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THE RIDDLE OF LIFE

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THE RIDDLE OF LIFE

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W. L. H. Burton
La Crescenta
Calif.
1929.

BY
NEVILLE S. TALBOT, D.D., M.C. 1879–
BISHOP OF PRETORIA
Sometime Fellow and Tutor of Balliol College and
Assistant Chaplain General
Author of The Returning Tide of Faith,
A Biblical Thoroughfare, etc.

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
THE BISHOP OF LONDON

LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO.
LONDON ▫ NEW YORK ▫ TORONTO
1929

TO THE MEMORY

of

FRIEDRICH VON HÜGEL

Prophet and Saint of God

this book

is lovingly and gratefully

dedicated

R.I.P.

INTRODUCTION

THIS book faces, and faces bravely, the age-long difficulty of the existence of pain and suffering in the world; and the author rightly refuses to acquiesce in the easy solution that all suffering is the direct Will of God or that it is given in exact proportion to the desert of the particular man or woman.

Suffering is a great mystery. As Mrs. Hamilton King says in the Sermon in the Hospital :

> " We suffer. *Why* we suffer, that is hid
> With God's fore-knowledge in the clouds of Heaven."

There is to my mind a peculiar pathos in this book, as the Bishop who wrote it had to face what to some of us seemed an almost inexplicable bereavement in the unexpected death of his young wife just when he was starting on his new work in Africa.

He leads us on to see that the only light in the dark mystery comes from Jesus Christ Himself, and quotes his " prophet," Von Hügel, as saying, " As regards the problem of evil it is as though we were out in a dark night with *one little* candle in our hands." As Dean Church said, " Without God, we are like children lost on a dark common at night." And the more we think of it, how true that is !

If Christ on the Cross was not God Himself, how should we be certain that God cared? If Christ had not risen from the dead, how could we be sure that good would entirely conquer evil, or that there was another, better life at all?

I welcome, then, this little book from across the seas; I asked the Bishop to write it, not only because I knew he would do it well, but also because it is so important to keep in close touch with those representing us in the Greater Empire.

But I welcome it not only from personal reasons, but because I believe that it may help many sufferers to find a sure ground of hope in their dark days, and will bring some light to those who, as they mourn, still sit in the Valley of the shadow of death.

A. F. LONDON:

PREFACE

IN choosing a subject for this little book, and in writing upon the subject which I have chosen, I have been haunted by a sense of presumption. Have I "exercised myself in great matters which are too high for me?" Have "I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, that I knew not?"

I cannot be sure. But I have, at any rate, called upon others for assistance. A relative, on reading the MS., expressed the wonder whether there were not too many quotations in it. I do not think so. I have felt the need of comrades, wiser, deeper and holier than myself, in writing about the problem of evil. I have, in particular, drawn on the matchless assistance provided by the writings of that mighty saint, Baron Friedrich von Hügel. This little essay will have done notable service if it sends its readers to his great books. To his memory I lovingly and gratefully dedicate what I have written.

NEVILLE PRETOR:

PRETORIA,
August 24th, 1928.

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CHAPTER I

THE RIDDLE OF LIFE

THE purpose of this little book is that it may be read during Lent. As such, it may be expected to deal with the great themes of sin and penitence. A long-established association of ideas encourages the expectation. Lent recurs that the "blessed passion and precious death" of our Lord may make their appeal once more to sinful mankind. "Behold we go up to Jerusalem" to meditate again upon the sacrifice for sin offered to the Father by the Saviour of the world, and to appropriate more fully the reconciliation effected between sinners and the all-holy God.

No one who knows his own heart can quarrel with this annual discipline. Amid everything in life that is perplexing to faith we may be sure that there is nothing which, in the last resort, is utterly tragic but moral evil. Though all the good things of life may be put at a man's disposal, they will be robbed of their efficacy if his heart is congested with unrepented sin—if centrally he is not right with, but is separated from, God. The decisive word holds good—"What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"[1]

Yet the theme of God's wonderful gift of remission of sin does not exhaust the meaning of the Gospel whereof the centre is the Cross. If that Gospel be summarized

[1] St. Mark, viii, 36.

by St. Paul in a sentence—"to wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself"; the reconciliation so effected was not only between sinners and Himself, but also between Himself and mankind as the victim of evil circumstances. There is more in life than sin to make it darkly perplexing. The sinner reconciled to God has yet to shoulder some of "the burden of the mystery of all this unintelligible world"; he has yet to hear the "groaning and travailing together in pain of the whole creation." The riddle of life remains to be faced. Man is not only his own victim; he is also the victim of the world which environs him. He is preyed upon by forces of evil which are without, not within, him. I doubt whether in the course of Christian tradition this has always been remembered. The full grandeur and range of the Christian faith have been obscured by the aptitude of its official exponents to harp exclusively upon the tragedy of sin. The "depth" of the Gospel, no doubt, is to be found in its probing down to, and remedying of, sin, the secret sickness of man's heart; but the majesty of its "length and breadth and height," is to be found in the fact—too much neglected—that it is the answer of God to the riddle of existence as a whole. Sin, after all, is a wearisome and barren object for thought. The contemplation of it seems to lead nowhere. A preoccupation with it may tend to breed a dullness and negativity which contrast poorly with the positive romance of life's adventure. Hence the rightness of an attempt to take a more inclusive view, and to consider the bearing of the Faith upon other elements in life—elements tragic indeed, yet not only tragic, but shot through with the glory of human heroism and high endeavour.

If there are souls—and there are many—who are oppressed by the problem of evil ; if many are separated from God, and feel that He is hidden from them by the dark enigmas which surround His providence and love ; then it must be right to essay to relieve this pressure, and to open a way through such separating barriers. Thus it might come to be that some souls were exposed anew to the sin-convicting reality of God. Thus to some who now keep Him at arm's length, He might come home again to rouse, cleanse and heal them, and to set them free.

The riddle of life then is our subject.

What is that riddle ? I answer the question by a quotation from Dr. Cairns' *The Reasonableness of the Christian Faith.* I do so the more readily because I think that here is a great little book. Little in size, but great in range and depth and passion of thought. I know of no better book to give to anyone sincerely asking fundamental questions. The riddle of life " is that Nature has produced a being nobler than herself. She has brought him into life, and now she seems to be incessantly seeking at once to nurture and to destroy him " . . . we may dwell " on the things in Nature which compel us to believe in her friendliness to man, but it is the sheerest sentimentality to gloss over the tremendous array of fact which may be brought forward on the other side. This sinister side of Nature works itself out in every human tragedy. One cannot get very far on in life without being confronted by it. Darwin has shown how deeply inwoven in the web of life is the element of struggle and pain, that it is no accident, but essential apparently to the very constitution of Nature. I say nothing here, however, about the tragic element in Nature. We are

concerned with it here simply in the realm of humanity. But the nature-tragedy is taken up into the human life. The first struggle for existence of primitive man was with the wild beasts, and the result was the hunting period of civilization. To-day one great part of the same struggle is the fight with disease, which we now know to be due for the most part to wild beasts in the organism. Why has Nature made her children so that they prey upon one another? The struggle for existence, moreover, is taken up into the life of nations, and results in war between nations. Nations have come into being because they have been able to establish a covenant between the warring groups of which they were once composed. But within that covenant we have still this struggle in the form of industrial competition, with all its evils. And into the whole struggling life of society the destroying powers of Nature come breaking ever and again. Messina earthquakes, *Titanic* disasters, Indian famines—these things are wrought by the Nature that seems so great and fair. She has wrought these terrible things in our day, and shows no repentance. She will certainly do them again. Has she not decreed love, and also—death? Does not this tremendous discord come echoing down all time? Are not both love and death essential to Nature as we know her? More sinister by far is it that Nature seems to war against character as well as against happiness. If misery always produced goodness, it would be another matter. If all those struck by disease were made patient and brave thereby, it would throw light on the problem of disease of the body. But it is not true. All are not so spiritualized by suffering. Further, the Nature element within us is what often makes our worst danger. The

very qualities that have enabled species of animals and races of men to survive and become populous and dominant, are often our worst temptations and obstacles to a higher life, when a bare existence has been won, and the new motive is to attain nobler existence. Nature seems to be our friend up to a certain point, and then to turn against us, as though she had made a nobler thing than herself, become jealous of it, and tried to arrest its further growth and destroy it. . . . Such thoughts lead us to see how dark and profound is the mystery of human life. 'All this,' says Newman, 'is a vision to dizzy and appal; and inflicts upon the mind the sense of a profound mystery which is absolutely beyond human solution.' It is surely a most significant thing that the greatest poets working at white heat on the substance of human life produce not comedies but tragedies, Prometheus, Œdipus, The Troades, Hamlet, Othello, Lear and Faust; that the greatest histories are those which, penned by Thucydides and Gibbon, tell of the going down of the sun of Athens, and the decline and fall of Imperial Rome; and that the greatest philosophies, whether in India, in Greece, or in Germany, seek to show that the true explanation of Nature is not found in herself at all, that she, with all her glory and beauty and terror and pain, is an apparent and transient life, and that the true home and abiding reality of the things of beauty and love is behind and above her in the Unseen. In all this we surely have an implicit judgment of 'this present world.'"[1]

Here then is the riddle of life.

Our quotation shows that the pain felt by the sensitive soul of man, at that which besets and oppresses him, is

[1] Cairns, *The Reasonableness of the Christian Faith*, pp. 11–17.

no new phenomenon. The wrestle of the human heart with the problem of evil is a thing of time immemorial.

Yet perhaps the pain is felt to-day with new, or at any rate with renewed, force. It seems that the century preceding ours was marked by a stripping away from hearts and souls of that which had somehow sheltered them, so to say, from the "weather." Certain is it that not so long ago people of our race could live snugly, and as it were, cushioned amid the riddle of life. We can look back over the nineteenth to the eighteenth century, and there we can see a life in which the poignancy and pathos of existence seem to have become oddly muffled. God and His providence, His harmonious architectural designing of life, could then be so coolly and calmly demonstrated. The Christian religion, which is really all passion through and through, had become so traditional as to be smugly conventional, complacent and unexacting. It could, indeed, be lightly jettisoned by untroubled Deists. "Enthusiasm," that is, a passion of faith, a vivid heartfelt conviction born of religious experience, could be decried, despised and thought utterly otiose by inflated Christian dignitaries. A world had come to be, minutely portrayed by the genius of Jane Austen, in which men and women could live swathed round, so as to be oblivious of the keen cutting edges of existence; could be so steeped in convention and respectability as to be insensitive to the tremendous drama, the blood and the tears, of human existence.

Such is another world than ours. The intervening years have rendered such stuffiness and cosiness impossible. The wind-tempering bandages have been torn off. Men in their frail little vessels have been swept out of quiet

and stagnant backwaters, to be at odds with the weather and to be out on the great waters. It would take long to analyse this process whereby the riddle of life has come to invade and disturb anew the soul of man.

It has to do in part with the unrolling by modern science of a tremendous new panorama of existence. Horizons, distances, periods of time, stages in the cosmic process of development, have opened out incalculably. The walls of the old building—the old view of the world, the old cosmogony—in which the soul of man dwelt comparatively comfortably, have fallen. Vastness has swept in on human imagination to benumb and appal. Man has seemed to dwindle in the face of the overwhelming scale and perspective of the universe. A sense of homelessness has been engendered in his heart.

And then Nature, so spread out into infinity, has been keenly examined in its mechanisms and processes ; and men have risen from the study wrung by doubts whether there is any correspondence between Nature and human values, ideals and moral aspirations. And so on.

At any rate, the sound of great cries which reverberated in the middle of last century has not died away. The stark voice of Huxley is still heard declaring that as regards the moral ideals of men " Nature is the headquarters of the enemy." Still the cries of the soul of Tennyson, dulled by the cold blasts of evolutionary science, are in our ears :

> " Are God and Nature then at strife,
> That Nature lends such evil dreams,
> So careful of the type she seems,
> So careless of the single life ;

That I considering everywhere
Her secret meaning in her deeds,
And finding that of fifty seeds
She often brings but one to bear,

I falter where I firmly trod,
And falling with my weight of cares
Upon the great world's altar-stairs
That slope through darkness up to God. . . ."

And still the desolation of Matthew Arnold, in face of the obliteration of old securities, arouses responsive echoes in our souls :

" The sea of faith
Was once, too, at the full and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating to the breath
Of the night-wind down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.

Ah, love, let us be true
To one another ! For the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath neither joy nor love, nor light
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain ;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight
Where ignorant armies clash by night."

No doubt there is much to be said and considered to diminish, to counter, and to correct such verdicts. Science

working in its own domain, has come to depict Nature as being more genial to and co-operative with human aspirations than a Huxley thought. Victorian pessimism and materialism have gone down before, so to say, the second thoughts of scientific men. The validity of a spiritual interpretation of existence has been and is being vindicated anew.[1]

Yet if we think of human society to-day as a whole, including as it does the mass of unlearned men and women, it is only true to say that a veil lies over it—a veil of doubt and hesitation about ultimate issues. After all, the world is still rocking from the convulsion of the War. Innumerable minds have been "shocked" out of acquiescence and security. The War has bred prolifically disenchantment, disillusion and cynicism. Deep in many hearts are memories which suggest that life, when stripped and laid bare, is just brutal and inimical to man. In many ears the assurances from pulpits speaking of the love and goodness and providence of God, sound glib, as beautiful, no doubt, but as not rooted in the reality of things.

So it is all the world over. In Africa—this book is written in Africa—we feel the pressure of the whole problem the more, owing to the intensified battle of man with Nature. To farmers (and I write as a farmers' bishop) the strange blend of malignity with benevolence in Nature is a sore perplexity. It obliterates the witness of beauty to God. Hear a South African woman speak. Her words spring from her in face of the scourge of locusts :

[1] See Cairns, *op. cit.*, pp. 59–61.

"Creatures formed by the Maker, Who placing us too below,
Gave us the earth for heritage—why do ye spoil us so?
We have fought a weary fight against drought for our poor green things,
And now ye have come to kill them, slayers on gleaming wings!

Wonders lie all around us—wonders of heaven and earth—
Mysteries of good and evil, mysteries of death and birth;
But ye are a greater mystery, creatures that God has made
To spoil our hard-won heritage, to steal our children's bread!

A cloud shimmering, shining, a cloud in the cloudless sky,
Myriads, myriads of them, flitting, flying on high!
Silver sheen on their armour, silent strength in their flight,
Raiders, tireless, ruthless, pitiless in their might."

The wonder occurs—What would Wordsworth make of African nature? His spiritual interpretation of Nature as the garment of the indwelling God—would it die away on his lips?[1] The wonder increases the nearer the tropics are approached. There malignity seems to swallow up benevolence. Listen to an acute observer of tropical Africa. "Nature has here said, 'Look, I will display all my powers of evil. I will do the worst I can. I will give querulous mankind something to whine about. I will silence the silliness that prattles of this 'beautiful world.' Then she took stinking slime and for hundreds of miles she laid down the mangrove swamps that never dry, and covered them with deadly growths that rot under their own darkness. . . . Into the forest she put deadly serpents and envenomed spiders, obscene reptiles and

[1] I see the same thought came to Mr. Aldous Huxley in the jungle in Java; see his *Jesting Pilate*.

scorpions as large as a woman's foot. Then over swamp and forest alike, she blew dense clouds of flies and every kind of poisonous insect—the fever gnat, the gnat that gives blackwater, compared with which malaria counts as health, the speck of life that makes a man swell like a bulbous tree, and the speck that sends him to the grave by a few months' sleep through madness. Savage ants also to tear his flesh as with red-hot pincers she poured upon the land in countless hordes, and ticks to suck his blood, and craw-craw to drive him frantic, and, in the sandy places, many millions of invisible jiggers to burrow into his toes and rot them away."[1]

So, in this way and that, a sense of the mystery of evil in human surroundings has sprung up with new force. The weight of the riddle of life presses on men's hearts. In some the result is an explicit scepticism. "That Man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual beyond the grave; that all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins—all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundations of unyielding

[1] Nevinson, *More Changes and More Chances*, p. 40.

despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built."[1]

In others the problem prompts—as we shall see—the endeavour to escape from its pressure by way of denying the reality of the oppressive facts. In others the effect is less conscious and articulate. In many a vague sense is engendered that life in the end is not to be trusted ; and this sense finds expression in a "playing for safety" (in a refusal to have children, for instance) ; in a recourse to present satisfactions (not least those of sex) while they may be enjoyed ; in a recklessness of living and an unbuttoning of restraints. Novels pour out of the presses, depicting with a kind of savage delicacy a mass of restless men and women, whose lives have no deep foundations, no holding anchorage in things unseen. Book after book portrays the ignobility of human nature, as it is embodied in those who are in captivity to their sensual, acquisitive and possessive selves. And over the whole stage and its actors hangs, as ever, the threatening menace of death ; whence spring those haunting misgivings which dog the pleasure-seeker and will not be "laid."

" ' Not ours,' say some, ' the thought of death to dread ;
Asking no heaven, we fear no fabled hell :
Life is a feast and we have banqueted—
Shall not the worms as well ?

The after-silence, when the feast is o'er,
And void the places where the minstrels stood,
Differs in nought from what hath been before,
And is not ill or good.'

[1] Bertrand Russell, *Philosophical Essays*, The Free Man's Worship, p. 60.

Ah, but the Apparition—the dumb sign—
The beckoning finger bidding me forego
The fellowship, the converse and the wine,
The songs, the festal glow.

And ah, to know not, while with friends I sit,
And while the purple joy is passed about,
Whether 'tis ampler day divinelier lit
Or homeless night without :

And whether, stepping forth, my soul shall see
New prospects, or fall sheer—a blinded thing !
There is, O grave, thy hourly victory,
And there, O death, thy sting."[1]

[1] William Watson, *The Great Misgiving*.

CHAPTER II

REJECTED EXPLANATIONS

WE are face to face with a formidable, indeed, a terrifying array of sombre facts. But, at any rate, we are face to face with it, and it is best to remain so. It is better to allow the full depth of the riddle of life than to attempt to minimize or to deny it. It is better to acknowledge that there is no solving of the riddle, than to be satisfied with some short-cut through it, some shallow explanation. It is better to hold our vessel up into the storm than to let her run before it.

The great souls and the deep thinkers have taken the better course. I shall have occasion to quote frequently from the writings of Baron Friedrich von Hügel, that man whose mind and soul were aflame with a passion of Christian conviction, which was his only because he had wrestled with all his mighty powers with the riddle of life. I shall refer to him as a 'great teacher.' No man has spoken home more authoritatively to the deepest spiritual and intellectual needs of our troubled times. I remember his saying in conversation, in the ardent tones which were so peculiarly his, "As regards the problem of evil it is as though we were out on a dark night, with *one little* candle in our hands!"

Then let it be remembered that it has been the historical *rôle* of religion to face and to grapple with the

mysteries of existence. No doubt religion has often not been faithful to the task. Alternately with her endeavour to wring some answer out of life's problems she has tried to "keep people quiet," to suppress their questionings, to drug them into insensibility and acquiescence.

Yet I think that Dr. Cairns is justified when he writes: "Religion historically recorded is, throughout, one sustained endeavour to grapple with the fundamental problem of the world and the soul. It must be plain to everyone who thinks that the problem . . . is primarily a practical problem, and only derivatively an intellectual one. For instance, when men are plague-stricken, their first problem is how they are to get well again, and this has set them to solve the intellectual problem of disease. The latter historically grows out of the former. Now, so it is with the problem of destiny. Man's primary concern is, How am I to overcome the world? Out of this springs the intellectual problem, How am I to understand the world? . . . Religion is, fundamentally, on the human side, man's protest to the Supreme, against the sorrows, indignities, and sins of this present world. It is the endeavour of man, through that appeal, to unite himself with the life of an unseen and ruling world, and so to win power from it to dominate and transmute the life of time. That is to say, in essence, religion, on the human side, is simply the sustained endeavour to meet this great problem of the destroying Nature and the struggling personality. All religions have this at their heart. They, one and all, start from an act of faith in an unseen world which is mightier than the world of sense and time, and which is either friendly or may be made friendly to the worshippers. . . . In every religion

there is some conception of the supreme good which the worshipper seeks to derive from heaven. The root idea here is of an enhancement of life which is the sovereign good of man. 'Religion,' said Sabatier, 'is a prayer for life.'

> 'Tis life whereof our nerves are scant,
> Oh life, not death, for which we pant;
> More life, and fuller, that I want.' "[1]

Then, as those who have inherited the "salvation" which is "of the Jews," we should be loyal to the task of facing up to the riddle of life instead of evading it. As we shall see later, it is of the very genius of the Old Testament, when properly understood, that it is sheerly unevasive and unminimizing about the evil and fatality which victimize mankind. Viewed as a record of human experience, it includes all that presses upon the human heart and baffles faith; it abounds in the most downright expressions of doubt and protest—of the agony which suffering, adversity and calamity squeeze, like wine from a winepress, out of the souls of men. It surpasses other religions in candour in the face of the facts of life, and it is as such that it leads up to the full and explicit raising to its highest pitch of the problem of existence, which lies at the heart of Christianity.

So it is best and right to be unevasive in face of all that confronts the soul. "The first necessity for us all is to have courage to look steadily into the dark."[2] It will be best, too, to allow at once that no inclusive solution

[1] Cairns, *The Reasonableness of the Christian Faith*, pp. 19–23.
[2] Cairns, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

of the problem is attainable. There *is* light—the light which "shined in the darkness and the darkness overwhelmed it not"[1]—but the light leaves much of the surrounding darkness unilluminated. *Omnia exeunt in mysterium*—all things issue in mystery. Much, when all is said, remains inscrutable and inexplicable.

What is needed is that which does go to the depth of the riddle of life—a line which plumbs to the bottom. So before we come to it, it will be well to set on one side some of the attempted explanations, the delusive short-cuts, the too-easy or too superficial solutions and justifications, which have been, and are, proffered from more than one quarter.

Denial of the Reality of Evil

(1) It is necessary to repudiate every endeavour to escape from the problem of evil by way of denying the reality of evil. That 'way out' is offered anew to-day by many apostles of 'New Thought,' and, in particular, by Christian Scientists. A desire—indeed, a mania—for health and a craving for comfort contribute to the popularity of this movement. Up to a point I would recognize in Christian Science a legitimate protest against the fatalism which has, in the course of the Christian generations, encroached upon Christianity. It is only candid to acknowledge that orthodoxy, more especially of the Calvinistic kind, has departed from and obscured the mind of Christ in inculcating a fatalistic acceptance of all that happens as the will of God. For the aggression of the faith of Jesus in the face of evil, for His holy impatience at that which held men in captivity in soul and

[1] St. John, i, 5.

in body, traditional Christianity has tended to substitute exclusively the virtues of patience and resignation. Christian Science is, I think, essentially a reaction from this attitude. But an end is abruptly brought to sympathy with such reaction when one is asked, by those who seek by a confident faith to overcome evil, to deny the reality of the evil to be overcome. One of my farmers said to me not long ago : "We all know that God is all-good and all-powerful. But then there is all the misery and suffering in the world as we know it. I cannot deny what God is, so I am driven to deny the reality of the misery and suffering." It is right to allow that evil is less real than good, but to deny that it is real at all is but self-persuasion and delusion which expose themselves readily to a relentless Nemesis. It is, in the language of the psychologists, "a regression into fantasy." Here are no really new phenomena. Let that great teacher Baron von Hügel speak at this point.

"Christianity has, from the first, immensely deepened and widened, it has further revealed, not the 'explanation'—which never existed for us men—but the fact, the reality, the awful potency and baffling mystery of sorrow, pain, sin, things which abide with men across the ages. And Christianity has, from the first, immensely increased the capacity, the wondrous secret and force which issues in a practical, living, loving transcendence, utilization, transformation of sorrow and pain, and even of sin. It is the literal fact, as demonstrable as anything that has happened or will happen to our human race can ever be, that Christianity, after some two centuries of the most terrific opposition, conquered—that it conquered in an utterly fair fight—a fight fair as regards the Christian

success—the philosophy of Greece and the power of Rome ; indeed, that it even conquered Gnosticism, that subtle Protean error so very dear to all over-ripe, blasé civilisations. It is the simple fact that Christianity conquered ; and it is equally the simple fact that it did so, above all because of what it actually achieved with regard to suffering. For Christianity, without ever a hesitation, from the first and everywhere, refused to hold, or even to tolerate, either the one or the other of the two attempts at self-persuasion which, then, as now, possess souls that suffer whilst they have not yet found the deepest. Christianity refused all Epicureanism—since man cannot find his deepest by fleeing from pain and suffering, and by seeking pleasure and pleasures, however dainty and refined. And it refused all Stoicism—since pain, suffering, evil are not fancies and prejudices, but real, very real ; and since man's greatest action and disposition is not self-sufficingness or aloofness, but self-donation and love. Christianity refused these theories, not by means of another theory of its own, but simply by exhibiting a Life and lives—the Life of the Crucified, and lives which continually relive, in their endless various degrees and ways, such a combination of gain in giving and of joy in suffering. Christianity thus gave to souls the faith to grasp life's nettle. It raised them, in their deepest dispositions and innermost will, above the pitiful oscillations and artificialities of even the greatest of the Pagans in this central matter—between eluding, ignoring pain and suffering, and, animal-like, seeking life in its fleeting momentary pleasures ; or trying the nobler yet impossible course—the making out that physical, mental, moral pain and evil are nothing real, and the suppressing

of emotion, sympathy and pity as things unworthy of the adult soul. Christianity did neither. It pointed to Jesus with the terror of death upon Him in Gethsemane ; with a cry of desolation upon the Cross in Calvary ; it allowed the soul, it encouraged the soul to sob itself out. It not only taught men frankly to face and to recognise physical and mental pain, death, and all other, especially all moral evils and suffering as very real ; it actually showed men the presence and gravity of a host of pains, evils and miseries which they had, up to then, quite ignored or at least minimized. And yet, with all this—in spite of all such material for despair, the final note of Christianity was, and is still, one of trust, of love, of transcendent joy. It is no accident, but of the very essence of the mystery and of the power of faith, it springs from the reality of God and of His action within men's souls, that, as the nobly joyous last chapters of Isaiah (Chapter xl to the end) contain also those wondrous utterances of the Man of Sorrows, so also the serenity of the Mount of the Beatitudes leads in the Gospels to the darkness of Calvary.

" Pray believe me here : it is to Christianity that we owe our deepest insight into the wondrously wide and varied range throughout the world, as we know it, of pain, suffering, evil ; just as to Christianity we owe the richest enforcement of the fact that, in spite of all this, God *is*, and that He is good and loving. And this enforcement Christianity achieves, at its best, by actually inspiring soul after soul, to believe, to love, to live His wondrous faith.

" Hence all attempts to teach Christianity anything on this central matter of pain and suffering would be, very

literally, 'to teach one's grandmother to suck eggs'!"[1]

Do my readers cry out at the difficulty—enhanced by the style—of the above? I beg them not to let themselves be overborne by it. Every effort to assimilate the deep wisdom of this great teacher will be greatly repaid.

(2) There are two other 'explanations' of the problem of evil which have to be put aside, despite the fact that they have been accepted by many good and pious people.

(*a*) *The Attribution of everything to God.*

The first is to attribute everything that happens to God, whether it be good or bad. To do so springs, as regards philosophers, from the desire to think everything into a comprehensive unity or system: as regards theologians, from the reluctance to allow that anything falls outside the sovereignty or providence of the one God.

It is at this point that the most difficult part of the road is reached. Difficulties beyond human solution are ready to spring up to devour the traveller. He is like the Pilgrim who, in his Progress, had to pass between lions on either side of the road leading to the Palace Beautiful. Speculation is bound to falter in face of questions that have to do with the relationship of God to His creation in general, and in particular to the partially free personalities in that creation, just because man is a finite creature, who can only see things in part and not as a whole. It seems that there are things which human thought cannot reconcile—time and eternity, the finite and the infinite, the freedom of man and the will of God, and so forth. The problem of evil brings these deep unanswerable

[1] Von Hügel, *Essays and Addresses on the Philosophy of Religion*, pp. 111–3.

questions to the fore. It ever raises the old problem of how the goodness or love of God can be reconciled with His power. The thought of mankind has swayed to and fro in front of these ultimate enigmas. It has swung (as in Plato) ever and again towards conceiving of God as above and beyond the world and its evil—as Transcendent—and in so doing has fallen into all the difficulties of dualism, that is, of splitting the universe into two parts. On the other hand, it has swung again and again back to the other extreme, that is of conceiving of God as being in all things and of all things being in God—of God as Immanent—and, in so doing, has been involved in the difficulties of making everything, good, bad and indifferent, equally divine. It has felt bound to exalt the complete sovereignty of God in His world, but only at the expense of making Him the author of evil as well as of good. And then, in reaction, it has put forward the notion of a finite God, limited by and struggling with the universe. And so on and so on.

It is impossible to embark on a proper discussion of these hoary problems here. It is right to draw attention to the fact of their presence. We must run the gauntlet past them, noting as we do so that the fundamental need which springs out of human experience is for *reconciliation*.

We will beware of attributing everything that happens to God. So our teacher, von Hügel, warns us: "Remember, please, it is not Judaism, not Christianity, not any kind of Theism that bids us, or even allows us, to hold and to accept as good in themselves the several painful or cruel or wrong things that happen in this our complicated, difficult life. None of these convictions worship Nature, or the world-as-a-whole; they all, on the contrary, find

much that is wrong in Nature as we know it, and in the world-as-a-whole as we actually find it. All such believers worship and adore not Nature but God—the love and the action of God within and from behind the world, but not as though this love and action were everywhere equally evident, not as though they directly willed, directly chose, all things that happen and as they happen. On the contrary : these great religions leave such a pure optimism to absolute idealists, philosophers, and to rhapsodising pantheists and poets ; and these religions believe such views, wheresoever they are taken as ultimate, to be either shallow and unreal, or sorry travesties of the facts."[1]

"Not Judaism." Yet an undiscriminating use of the Old Testament, as the book of Judaism, has led pious souls to trace the Hand of God in everything. For the people of the Old Testament, at certain stages in their development, made the most resolute attempts to find an explanation for the suffering and adversity which come upon men, by believing it to be the punishment sent by God for sin. Deuteronomy, for instance, is full of the belief that God rules the world and manipulates the forces of Nature according to a system of retribution. Goodness He rewards with prosperity ; sin He rewards with adversity. So, where catastrophes and calamities come in to overwhelm men, it is His Hand which sends them, they are His visitation, His chastening rod. A psalm strikes the same note. "A fruitful land maketh He barren for the wickedness of them that dwell therein."[2]

[1] Von Hügel, *op. cit.*, p. 115.
[2] Psalm cvii, 34.

For two main reasons this 'explanation' is to be rejected.

(1) The Old Testament itself contains such rejection, though an all-levelling Biblical literalism has failed to discern it. A later stage of Jewish thought and faith turned round on earlier stages to repudiate their verdicts. That is the significance of the grandly protesting book of Job. Job has no answer to the riddle of suffering, but, anyhow, he rejects the verdict of his "comforters." They sit round him, chiming out the view that all that has come upon him is explicable as due to his sin. He is under the punishing Hand of God. The protest and repudiation of Job spring from his sense that this verdict does not cover the facts. It does not allow for the fact of innocent and undeserved suffering. So, with vehemence, he "holds fast his integrity."[1]

(2) The second and greater reason for rejecting the "explanation" in question is the Mind of Christ. Once more, the old undiscriminating habit of putting all parts of the Bible on a level, and in particular of attaching an equal importance to the Old as to the New Testament, has had grievous and disastrous results. The differences between the Mind of Christ and earlier Jewish conceptions and convictions have been blurred. The "old skins" have been fetched out, and somehow have been made to contain and to disguise His "new wine."

Our Lord stands right away from the Old Testament conception that God so manipulates nature as to make it an instrument of reward and punishment. A great decisive word makes it plain—"He sendeth rain on the just and the unjust." That absolves us in Africa, where

[1] Job, xiii, 15.

rainfall is so tremendous a factor in the lives of farmers, from the grim task of congratulating those who have had good rains on their moral excellence, and of condemning the drought-stricken for their moral turpitude.

Our Lord dissociated Himself from the conviction, which was in the minds of His followers, that God had physical calamity in His hands to cast at sinful men. "His disciples, James and John, said: Lord, wilt thou that we bid fire to come down from heaven and consume them (the Samaritans), even as Elijah did? But he turned and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of."[1]

He saw life as holding within it times of rude testing. He took no fair weather view of things. Upon houses built, torrents, He saw, would beat in spate. But they would do so irrespective of the characters of the people inside them. They would come alike on those who built on rock, or on those who built on sand. Troubles, in a word, come upon good and bad. The storms of life assail both the faithful and the faithless.

He warned His followers from the ready attribution of calamity to the sin of those upon whom it fell. He would not have it that the specially terrible disaster of the falling of the Tower of Siloam, to crush the life out of some men, was due to their special sinfulness. He discouraged the diagnosis that the blindness of the man born blind was the result of his or his parents' sin.

He uttered one most far-reaching word, which should for ever deter us from being free with God's will as the explanation of evil happenings. Man, He knew, might despise the "little ones" and make them to "stumble,"

[1] St. Luke, ix, 54 ff.

but not God. For "it is *not* the will of your Father which is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish."[1] So we resolutely set aside the idea that all that happens, good and bad, is to be attributed to God.

(*b*) *The Attribution of the Problem to Man*

We must also put aside the "explanation" of the problem of evil which takes the form of attributing all of it to man. Christians have been very ready with a theodicy, that is a justification of the ways of God to man, which accounts for the evil in the world as due to human sin. The blame of everything has been thrown on to man.

This endeavour goes back a very long way. We detect it in the early pages of Genesis, which contain the attempt of early Semitic thought to arrive at a verdict upon life's painful mysteries. That Nature should be so recalcitrant and malignant; that the earth should be productive not only of fruit but of thorns and thistles; that man should be slaving to subdue it in the sweat of his brow; that women should travail in pain in bringing forth children—these mysterious facts are attributed to human sin.

And in later times, and indeed until very recently, towering edifices of theological doctrine have been built on the literal acceptance of the story of the Fall of Adam and Eve as historical. The world has been conceived of as made all at once, as complete and entirely good; and as then marred and corrupted by human transgression and its consequences. There, then, is the explanation of the whole problem—the origin of the evil in the world is sin.

[1] St. Matthew, xviii, 14.

That accounts for every difficulty. So say the words of Milton, with their majestic roll :

> " Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit
> Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste
> Brought death into the world and all our woe." . . .[1]

Now it is folly to deny that sin is a tremendous factor in the whole problem of evil. As we have said, the uttermost, the most essential tragedy in life, is bound up with moral evil. If we accept, as assuredly we should, the Biblical verdict upon sin—that verdict which it was given to the Jew to declare as a result of his agonizing in experience over the actuality of sin—we shall look upon it as unnatural and unnecessary, as an alien intruder into God's world, as that which has dragged mankind down and away from God's purpose for mankind. We can legitimately wonder about the great " might-have-been "—about how different the world and its history might have been had man, when at last in his full human powers he came to stand upon the earth, not abused his birthright of freedom, had he not fallen and fallen again and again from obedience to God into devotion to himself. We have, further, to admit that an enormous part of the suffering in the world is due to sin ; that its wages are death ; that sin is the sting of death, when it is remembered that human death is not just the ending of a merely physical existence, but the dissolution of a moral and spiritual being. The dread consequences of sin relentlessly work themselves out, for this world is governed

[1] In order to amplify the extremely summary treatment in the text of the great subject of the Fall, I have printed in Appendix I a sermon thereon which I recently preached at Johannesburg.

according to law not only in its physical sphere but in its moral. All this is true. It is but to deceive ourselves to deny it.

Yet sin is not the whole problem. Never again can we conceive the world as our fathers did, as coming in all respects perfect from the hand of the Creator. Never again can we be so clear-cut and positive about the origins of things. Sharply defined and sheer beginnings have been taken from human vision. And, in their place, age after age in the newly apprehended cosmic process recede into the gulf of time, just as range upon range of mountains melt away into the blue. As we peer back along the tremendous and seemingly unending slope up which life on this planet has climbed ; as we try to unravel, at any rate, the later stages of the processes through which man at last has come to be, it is flatly impossible even to utter, still less to rest satisfied with, the old facile explanation that all the conditions of human struggle, all that made life precarious and hazardous, all the cruel and devouring elements in the environment of mankind, are due to sin. "Were man's sin no factor in the world, some say, life's miseries would cease ; all the anguish of our earthly lot stands not to God's responsibility but to human shame. But the suffering of God's creatures did not begin with man's arrival, and the pain of creation before man sinned is a longer story than earth's misery since. Let Romanes picture the scene : 'Some hundreds of millions of years ago, some millions of millions of animals must be supposed to have become sentient. Since that time till the present, there must have been millions and millions of generations of millions and millions of individuals. And throughout all this period of incal-

culable duration, this inconceivable host of sentient organizations have been in a state of unceasing battle, dread, ravin, pain. Looking to the outcome, we find that more than one half of the species which have survived the ceaseless struggle are parasitic in their habit, lower and insentient forms of life, feasting on higher and sentient forms; we find teeth and talons whetted for slaughter, hooks and suckers moulded for torture—everywhere a reign of terror, hunger, sickness, with oozing blood and quivering limbs, with gasping breath and eyes of innocence that dimly close in deaths of cruel torture.' Is man responsible for that? For cold that freezes God's living creatures, for lightning that kills them, for volcanoes that burn them, for typhoons that crush them—is man responsible? By no such easy evasion may we escape the problem which faith must meet. 'In sober truth,' as John Stuart Mill exclaimed, 'nearly all the things which men are hanged or imprisoned for doing to one another are Nature's everyday performances.' "[1]

Perhaps it will be rejoined that there is rhetoric here, and not only so, but an indulgence in that form of the pathetic fallacy, which reads into the experience of animals pains which owe their actuality to the self-consciousness of human beings. Perhaps it will be said that here is an instance of an attempt to overwhelm the imagination and smother the reason, by picturing suffering in the mass; whereas the suffering of one individual is as great as that of innumerable individuals and the problem constituted by it is not increased by multiplying the number of sufferers. And so on.

[1] Fosdick, *The Meaning of Faith*, p. 143.

Yet, say what anyone will, an irreducible measure of truth remains, that of the suffering which man has to bear, some of it comes upon him from outside and for it he is not responsible.

We will resolutely then reject the explanation which attributes the whole of the problem of evil to man.

CHAPTER III

LIGHT SPRINGING UP IN THE DARKNESS

WE are out indeed on a dark night, and our candle seems to be guttering in our hand. "If one look unto the land, behold darkness and distress, and the light is darkened in the clouds thereof."[1]

(*a*) *Light deeper than Darkness*

Nevertheless we must not blench. Light will spring up in the darkness. That is, I think, what we must look for. We must abandon all effort to explain away the black facts which confront us—all effort to wave over them some theory which shall make them to be other than they are, or to arrive at some satisfying explanation of their origin. And, instead, we should, so to say, let the facts speak for themselves, while we watch and listen to see whether they disclose some deeper meaning than was apparent at first sight. A welling-up of light within the darkness is to be looked for, a coming of relief from the same source as the affliction. It is as though we have to be healed by a hair of the same dog that has bitten us.

Life is full of this experience. The very phenomena which perplex and distress are found to have within them a testimony which, while it does not explain, reassures and encourages. Thus our very sense of the fleeting

[1] Isaiah, v, 30.

transience of this mortal life points to and implies the reality of that which is eternal and abiding. It has within it the evidence that we are more than creatures of time. So with sorrow—the sorrow of bereavement, the pain of the sundering of lovers by death. Nothing, no matter how one pretends, can mitigate the sorrow. Consolation cannot still it, indeed, cannot reach it. But within sorrow is love. Out of love it springs. Were it not for love it would not be. Its very strength testifies to a reality deeper than itself.

So with doubt, which can so powerfully render desolate the soul. It is often not to be met or affected by argument. Like sorrow, its very vigour shakes off that which would palliate it. But within doubt is faith. The energy of a questing faith is within it. The sense of being without an answer to one's questions could not be, but for the implied assurance that an answer is nevertheless to be found. Finding is somehow implicit in seeking. The great saying proves true—"Thou couldst not seek Me, had I not already found thee."

So with sense of guilt, the sorrow for sin, the pain of realized self-betrayal and separation from God. There they are. Denial, condoning, do not meet them. The heart knows its own bitterness, which will not lightly be healed. But within sorrow for sin is a craving for goodness. Misery over the victory of the lower self is a sign of the existence and the vitality of the higher. The deeper the penitence, the brighter the hope that sin will be overcome and evicted. Out of the facts which dismay —welling up from within them—flows healing and the hope of spiritual health.

So it seems justifiable in face of the dark facts of life's

riddle to expect that the facts will themselves prove to be luminous—to have light within them deeper than the darkness.

And so it is. It is the reality of goodness which gives force to the realization of what is evil. The blackness of what is evil is splashed against the whiteness of what is good—else it would not be known. Black upon black is invisible. The dark things of life are indeed mysterious, they affront and perplex the believer in God and in goodness. They are a problem to him. But the good things in life—they are also mysterious, the more mysterious in face of the presence of the evil things. They are a problem to the disbeliever and the pessimist. There is, in short, a problem of good as well as a problem of evil. The facts of life are not all of one colour. They have in them the force of contrast. We know this, of course. Nature declares it. Day succeeds to night, spring to winter. There is " clear shining after rain."

(*b*) *Light upon Heroic Brows*

But a further bright light is to be seen glowing at the heart of the dread scene of suffering and calamity. Such things happen to men ; and the light is the way in which they meet, use and overcome them. We may speak (and truly) of a darkness environing man, but it cannot smother the blazing light of human heroism. In fact, it seems to be of life's very savour that it should abound in difficulty, risk, danger, calamity, just because of the tremendous glories of character which spring from the brave encountering of them. " Our highest admiration is always reserved for men who master difficult circumstances. If the story of Joseph, begun beside Bedouin camp fires

centuries ago, can easily be naturalized beside modern radiators ; if *Robinson Crusoe*, translated into every tongue, is understood by all, the reason lies in the depth of man's heart, where to make the most out of untoward situations is a daily problem. Not everyone can grasp the argument or perceive the beauty of ' Paradise Lost ' and ' Paradise Regained,' but one thing about them every man appreciates—the blind Milton, sitting down to write them :

> " I argue not
> Against Heaven's hand or will, nor bate a jot
> Of heart ; or hope ; but still bear up and steer
> Right onward."

The full understanding of Ole Bull's playing on the violin was necessarily restricted to the musical, but no restriction bounds the admiration of men, learned or simple, when in a Munich concert his A string snaps and he finishes the composition on three strings. That is the human problem in epitome. Getting music out of life's remainders after the break has come ; winning the battle with what is left from a defeat ; going blind, like Milton, and writing sublimest poetry ; or deaf, like Beethoven, and composing superb sonatas ; being reared in an almshouse and buried in Westminster Abbey, like Henry Stanley ; or like Kernahan, born without arms and legs, and yet sitting at last in the British Parliament—all such hardihood and undiscourageable pluck reach back in a man's bosom beyond the strings that ease and luxury can touch, and strike there a reverberating chord. Nothing in human life is so impressive as pluck, ' fighting with the scabbard after the sword is gone.' . . . Adversity rightly used so develops and reveals character that we may expect to find trouble as a background to the most admirable men of the

race. We read the luminous histories of Francis Parkman and do not perceive, behind the printed page, the original manuscript, covered with a screen of parallel wires, along which the blind author ran his pencil that he might write legibly. We think of James Watt as a genius at invention, and perhaps recall that Wordsworth said of him : 'I look upon him, considering both the magnitude and the universality of his genius, as perhaps the most extraordinary man that this country ever produced.' But Watt himself we forget—sickly of body, starving on eight shillings a week, and saying, 'Of all things in life there is nothing more foolish than inventing.' Kant's philosophy was a turning point in human thought, but lauding Kant, how few recall his struggle with a broken body ! Said he, speaking of his incurable illness, 'I have become master of its influence in my thoughts and actions by turning my attention away from this feeling altogether, just as if it did not at all concern me.' Wilberforce, the liberator of British slaves, we know, and beside his grave in Westminster Abbey we recall the superb title that he earned, 'the attorney-general of the unprotected and of the friendless,' but the Wilberforce who for twenty years was compelled to use opium to keep himself alive, and had the resolution never to increase the dose—who knows of him ? One of the chief rewards of reading biography is this introduction that it gives to handicapped men ; the knowledge it imparts of the world's great saints and scripture-makers, conquerors and reformers, who in the words of Thucydides, 'dared beyond their strength, hazarded against their judgment, and in extremities were of excellent hope.' "[1]

[1] Fosdick, *The Meaning of Faith*, pp. 131–3.

So it is that against the dark background of the stage on which mankind plays its part, the light that shines upon the brows of heroic men and women is thrown into sharp relief. Here is that which is a real counterweight to misery and adversity. A change comes over the tremendous scene of human existence when character rather than happiness is made paramount in our judgment upon it. "We may well inquire, when we complain of this world's misery, what sort of world we are seeking in its place. Are we asking for a perfectly happy world? But happiness, at its deepest and its best, is not the portion of a cushioned life which never struggled, overpassed obstacles, bore hardships, or adventured in sacrifice for costly aims. A heart of joy is never found in luxuriantly coddled lives, but in man and woman who achieve and dare, who have tried their powers against antagonisms, who have met sickness and bereavement and have tempered their souls in fire. Joy is begotten not chiefly from the impression of happy circumstances but from the expression of overcoming power. Were we set upon making a happy world, therefore, we could not leave struggle out nor make adversity impossible. The unhappiest world conceivable by man would be a world with nothing hard to do, no conflicts to wage for ends worth while; a world where courage was not needed, and sacrifice was a superfluity. Beside such an inane lotos-land of tranquil ease this present world, with all its suffering, is a paradise. Men, in fact, find joy where in philosophy we might not look for it. Said Macmillan, after a terrific twelve months on the Arctic continent: 'This has been the greatest year of my life' . . . That we should be merely happy is not an adequate end of the

creative purpose for us, or of our purpose for ourselves. In our best hours we acknowledge this in the way we handle trouble. However much in doubt a man may be about the theory of suffering, he knows infallibly how suffering practically should be met. To be rebellious, cursing fate and hating life ; to pity oneself, nursing one's hurts in morbid self-commiseration—the ignobility of such dealing with calamity we indubitably know. Even where we fall feebly short of the ideal, we have no question what the ideal is. When in biography or among our friends we see folk face crushing trouble, not embittered by it, not made cynical or thrust into despair, but hallowed, sweetened, illumined and empowered, we are aware that noble characters do not alone *bear* trouble, they use it . . . they make it the minister of character ; they set it to build in them what nothing save adversity can ever build—patience, courage, sympathy and power. They even choose it in vicarious sacrifice for the good of others, and by it save the world from evils that nothing save someone's suffering could cure. They act as though *character*, not happiness, were the end of life. And when they are at their best they do this, not with stoic intrepidity, as though trouble's usefulness were but their fancy, but joyfully, as though a good purpose in the world included trouble, even though not intending it. . . . If now we really want a world in which character is the end and aim—and no other world is worth God's making—we obviously may not demand the abolition of adversity. If one imagines a life from its beginning lapped in ease and utterly ignorant of what words like hardship, sorrow and calamity imply, we must imagine a life lacking every virtue that makes human nature admirable. Character

grows on struggle ; without the overcoming of obstacles great quality in character is unthinkable. Whoever has handled well any calamitous event possesses resources, insights, wise attitudes, qualities of sympathy and power that by no other road could have come to him. For all our complaints against life's misery, therefore, and for all our inability to understand it in detail, who would not hesitate, foreseeing the consequences, to take adversity away from men ? He who banishes hardship banishes hardihood ; and out of the same door with calamity walk Courage, Fortitude, Triumphant Faith, and Sacrificial Love."[1]

I have quoted at length, for I think what I have quoted is splendidly put, and with far greater skill and fertility of illustration than I can command. As we read and ponder it we may perhaps be aware of a certain revulsion of feeling, carrying us away from our dismay at the problem of the evil that besets man and towards an acceptance of it as necessary to his goodness. Here we should be on our guard. Suffering and pain remain evil, though they can be borne and used and transmuted. That is true of this life. But we will not allow that ultimately they are necessary to goodness. We will keep the vision and the hope which looks towards the world where they shall be no more. To this we shall return later.

In the midst of the darkness then light springs up. The facts of life, for all their terrific character, reveal and communicate that which stimulates and reassures.

[1] Fosdick, *op. cit.*, pp. 149–51.

(c) *The Testimony of Israel*

At this point the voices of the people whose experience is recorded in the Old Testament ask to be heard. To pass on to them is natural after the eye of the mind has rested on the procession of heroic souls, illuminating the darkest pages of history by their victory over evil circumstance. The Jews never solved the riddle of life, though they were in persistent travail to do so. But, at any rate, they found inspiration in the great roll of the heroes and martyrs of their race. They kept a tenacious hold upon the glories of their past. So the converted Jew, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, writing to his fellow Jewish Christians, bade them cast their eyes back on the past, and see it lit up by those who in the past had been the successive embodiments of faith—"who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises . . . they were tortured, not accepting their deliverance . . . others had trials of mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, they were slain with the sword . . . of whom the world was not worthy."[1]

Here, indeed, are the mysteries of suffering, here are the circumstances which prompt pessimism and despair, yet they ring with victory and hope. From this great chapter valiant souls will ever draw encouragement as water from a spring.

But for further reasons the pressure of the riddle of life upon the soul sends us back to the Old Testament, over which the writer to the Hebrews cast his eyes in

[1] Hebrews, xi, 33 ff.

survey. We return not just to the book, but to the people behind the printed page. For once the basic and elemental questions of life are alive, they too spring forward to life again. Before they may have seemed buried in the past—people of an antiquity remote from the present. But once anyone is in real travail with life's riddle, lo ! at his side he finds Jewish companions, who have stepped forth, as it were, from their graves, and are found to have in their hearts the very same pain as he has, and on their lips the cries which perfectly express it. For by no other people in history was the pain of life more acutely felt, to no other people did it befall to be so nakedly exposed—as it seemed—to the cruel bludgeonings of fate. The prolonged experience of this little people is an epitome of the spiritual strivings and sorrows of mankind.

It would take long to expound this.[1] Two salient facts are to be apprehended about the people of the Old Book. First, they were the people who, as they emerge into the light of historical times, are found to be charged with a passion of concern for the righteousness of God. For they were a people who—so they repeatedly testified—had been laid hold of by Another. And out of an infancy of savage, tribal conceptions of Him, He had led them up to a maturity of faith in Him as the One, the Only, the Righteous and Holy God. More and more it had come home to them that, despite their ever-recurrent infidelity, they were a people of destiny : that they were in the hands of Him who had a purpose for them and through them for the world.

Secondly, this conviction, painfully enwrought into

[1] Perhaps I may be allowed to refer to a fuller handling of the subject in my *A Biblical Thoroughfare* (Student Christian Movement).

their souls and written on their hearts, was intimately connected with history. Out of history their destiny had come to them. God to them was He who had taken action in history in the past, and who would fulfil His action in the past by action in the future. Such is the burden of their great prophetic teachers, who were the instruments in God's hands of their religious education and purification.

Hence it was to history, to the actual facts of life, that they looked for the trace of the divine footsteps. Hence again and again the agony of dismay which filled their hearts. For history again and again was a wild scene of confusion and calamity. It was the scene where God—despite all " their fathers had told them " of His presence and His power—was, to all appearances, absent. As they went to the facts of history for reassurance it seemed to be not forthcoming.

If we wish to verify this we must turn to the Psalms, that is, to the slowly-accumulated book which gathered up the vivid expressions of faith and confidence, of gratitude and thanksgiving, of doubt and terror, of hate and vengefulness, which came out of the soul of this people from within the wine-press of historical experience.

I turn to a great and beloved teacher to draw all this out further with a power that is not mine.

The Jew " was always asking—Why is the earth allowed to be what it is ? Why is it left alone by God, to suffer such dire injustice : to bow under such unremedied wrong : to lie stricken by so much undeserved pain : to be the pitiable prey of plague and violence and cruelty and slaughter ? Why is God so little in evidence ? Why does He not rend the Heavens and come down ? Why

is He a God who hides Himself? How can He patiently tolerate this welter of evil? Why should the earth, if it be His earth, nevertheless be so full of darkness and cruel habitations? These were the questions that haunted pious Jews day and night, as they tossed through the weary hours on sleepless beds, under the stress of their perplexed broodings. We still rehearse their bitter cries every month, though with little result, so far as we can judge.[1] Those boys had heard them, time after time, in their school Chapel. The father knew them familiarly, almost by heart, though, apparently, he had never guessed that they were asking and trying to answer his question. Yet, surely, they are poignant enough: they might be expected to arrest attention. Listen to one of them:

'I will cry unto God with my voice: even unto God will I cry with my voice: and He shall hearken unto me.

'In the time of my trouble I sought the Lord. My sore ran and ceased not in the night season. My soul refused comfort.

'When I am in heaviness I will think upon God: when my heart is vexed, I will complain.

'Thou holdest mine eyes waking: I am so feeble that I cannot speak.

'In the night I commune with my own heart, and search out my spirit.

[1] These words were written during the War, and were thus occasioned. "'My boy at school,' said a father of high intelligence the other day, 'is asking, as all his fellows are, how or why it is that God, if He is what we are told, allows anything so horrible and savage as this War?' 'And I had to confess,' said the father, that I had never heard of an answer to the question.' Now is not that strange? Not the question indeed: that is natural enough in all conscience: but that the boys should think that they had started it! And strangest of all that an intelligent man should never have heard of an answer that had been given to it."

'Will the Lord absent Himself for ever? And will He be no more intreated?

'Is His mercy clean gone for ever, and His promise come utterly to an end for evermore?
'Hath God forgotten to be gracious, and will He shut up His lovingkindness in displeasure?'

"Or here is another, who sees the world given over to savage insolence, to cruel wreck, to heartless desolation and triumphant wrong:

'O God, wherefore art Thou absent from us so long? Why withdrawest Thou Thy hand?
'Why pluckest Thou not Thy right hand out of Thy bosom to consume the enemy?
'Forget not the congregation of the poor for ever.
'O let not the simple go away ashamed.
'Arise, O God, maintain Thine own cause.
'Remember how the foolish man blasphemeth Thee daily.
'Forget not the voice of Thine enemies.
'The presumption of those that hate Thee increaseth ever more and more.'

"Or again, there is that terrifying cry of the outraged and bewildered conscience, which was yet to receive a yet more terrible realization:

'My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me? And art so far from my health, and from the words of my complaint?
O, my God, I cry in the daytime and Thou hearest not. And in the night time also I take no rest.'

"So bitterly it stung long ago—this anguish—this bewilderment that we feel to-day.

"And there are two points to note in their passionate protests. First, the passion, the anguish, in this appeal, draws all its intensity from the ardour of their belief in the God whom they adjure. As an historical fact it is only the Jew who has been seriously sensitive to the acuteness of the problem—for it is only he who looked to God to verify himself as a God of Righteousness. That was the very heart of his Faith. And this Divine Righteousness was to be exhibited on the earth in human affairs, under the category of history. God had been apprehended by the Jew in this special character—as a God of action, engaged on this very historical scene in which man played his part, pledged to achieve, for all men, a consummating blessing, here and now, in tangible fact, working through the men chosen specially to co-operate in the task. God acts and works before our eyes. That is the manner of His manifestation. So the Jew signalized himself by believing. And this then is the secret of his clamorous outcry at God's failure to vindicate His purpose on the very ground and under the very conditions to which He stood pledged by His Holy Covenant. It was a collapse at the centre. So the question, which our boys lightly asked, had burned itself into the very soul of the Jew. No one ever knew its force as he did. And the height of his indignation at the divine defect, at the hiding of God's Face, is a measure, therefore, of his loyalty to the Divine Name. And that is why the dramatic champion of Israel's creed in the Book of Job is justified by God for all his stormy impatience. He has filled the whole heaven with his indomitable appeal. He has poured out his soul in vehement attack on a God who fails to justify Himself at man's judgment bar. Nothing

shall avail to silence his scathing criticism—his passionate challenge. He spends his extra force in driving home the inquiry—'Why does God leave the wicked in possession? Why does He allow this scandalous iniquity? Why is human life a caricature, an insult, an outrage? Why does it contradict everything that we hold true of the Divine Name?' So he storms on and on in the fury of his indignation. And he was right so to clamour, in these stormy outbursts. So God decides. The heat, the violence, the excess of his protests, were all tributes to his inherent loyalty of belief. If he relied with all his soul on God being a God of active righteousness, then it was natural that all his soul should spend itself in the agony of finding his faith falsified. Therefore God approved of Job, just because it was his faith in God which created the problem against which he protested. And this good work of Job and of the Psalms remains with us to this hour. It is the fact that these heroes of the Old Testament have rooted in us their conviction that God must be just, and God must be good, which alone accounts for the anxiety of our boys to-day as they ask, 'Why does God allow the earth to be what it is?—to go on as it does—to be disgraced by such outrages as this wild war of ours?'

"The trouble then sprang out of the Faith. It bore witness to the sincerity of the Faith. And this explains the second characteristic of it, in its Old Testament form. This characteristic is that those who feel the trouble go straight to God with it. They let loose their protest in His presence. This is so remarkable, both in Job and in the Psalms. The vehement indignation, the extraordinary cries of complaint, are all addressed to God. That is why

the very vehemence does not signalize a revolt against God, but an appeal to Him. To whom else should they appeal? Their confidence in His justice is the motive which drives them wild. He and He alone must reassure them. There must be reasons why He does what He does. He is Lord of all: He can do what He will. Let Him then open His mind and His counsel to those who desire so passionately to vindicate His Name before the heathen."[1]

So in the toils of the mystery of evil we are joined by companions from the past, and not only joined but led by them. Just as a party of climbers watch their leader go ahead of them to explore and to find out the way, so men may watch this little people (a remnant, no doubt, of them) strive in the exploration of a way up the great frowning cliff of the evil in the world. They exhibit a wonderful persistence. One generation may rest satisfied with a certain proposed solution of the problem, but succeeding ones criticize and reject it. Thus, as we have seen, the supposition that adversity is the reward of sin, meeting it exactly and justly, just as virtue is rewarded by prosperity—that supposition is set aside. And then others are tried. Suffering, calamity, are interpreted as the means whereby God chastens men: they are a rod in His hand. Or they are employed by Him to test them, for their probation, that out of them, as out of a fiery trial, they may come forth as gold. So the search, the exploration, is persisted in. It leads to the hope (technically called Apocalyptic) that God will vindicate Himself through suddenly-arriving catastrophe—that history will prove the scene of the fulfilment of His

[1] H. S. Holland, *So as by Fire*, pp. 51–4.

purpose, but only through the destruction of history as it is, and the substitution for it of a new order of things. It leads to the vision of a life beyond this life. Out of the stress of the great quest springs the "hope" that is "full of immortality."

Thus these spiritual leaders of mankind go ahead, with an unquenchable ardour. They press on into the darkness, never satisfied, never possessed of a final answer, yet never despairing. And all the while they nourish a great heart-held hope, which they guard as a flame against extinction, feeding it with the oil of faithful expectation. It is the hope that the day of God will arrive, bringing His vindication, the day of His Kingdom and victory. So they strive and wait and watch. "As watchmen wait for the morning" they wait for the dawn of the great day. They look for "the consolation of Israel."

This is a great and comforting spectacle. The debt of mankind to the people of the Old Testament is very great. One further element in that debt remains still to be mentioned. It is the deepest verdict upon the mystery of suffering which it was given to any of them to declare. And it is also the supreme instance of the way in which facts, which are unalterable from without, are capable of transformation from within. This last word of the Jew about suffering—that which shows him penetrating deeper and climbing higher than any other—has to do with the power of sacrificial love to bear suffering for the sake of others, and so to transform suffering from within. This goes deeper than the light which is shed upon the problem by the heroic souls who face and endure and use pain and adversity—

" who welcome each rebuff
Which turns earth's smoothness rough."

What is this last word ?

I will quote again. " What did the Jew finally arrive at ? Well, at his highest, he saw that probation was too external an explanation. Indirectly, wrongs might be used to test loyalty and to school character. But if they are to be thoroughly vindicated as consistent with the honour of God, one must go deeper. They must be actually transmuted from being outrages on God, into being His proper materials : they must be changed from within, so that their very curse may become a blessing. They must be shown, by experience, to be worthy and consistent means for working out the divine counsels of love and righteousness. What is the spiritual power which can so transmute them, that they cease to be instruments by which the devil attacks and breaks us, and become the vessels and the channels of the divine manifestation, showing us more of God's love than we could have known in any other way ? There is one power that can do it—the power of sacrifice. The sacrificial spirit, at work within the heart of the pain and the loss and the misery, can make its sufferings serve the cause that God has at heart. So they nobly dreamed. And their dream took actual shape and reality, in Israel as the Suffering Servant,[1] who by his loss of all that the earth had to give him of home and country and peace and freedom, became, through his pitiable exile, a light of God's Word to the very people who had broken his peace and wrecked his home and

[1] See Isaiah, liii. Behind the period of this immortal chapter there stands, we may surely believe, the tense figure of the prophet-martyr Jeremiah.

burnt his shrine. The Servant of the Lord does not heroically defy the buffets of fortune, and dare them to do their worst, as Job did. He outflanks the whole position. He gets at the back of it. He enters into it from within ; he refuses nothing of it, but makes the very worst his own. He yields. He gives his back to the smiter, his cheeks to him that plucketh out the hair. He bows under scourge and spitting ; he goes as a sheep to the slaughter. He suffers the whole torrent of wrong to pass over him. And then, from out of his own inherent willingness to suffer and to die, for love of God, and of those who smite and slay, he transmutes the whole body of evil, and forces it to take its colour from him, and imposes upon it a purpose of which it never dreamed. He convicts sin of its own sinfulness by the very strength of his own willing surrender to its spite and hate. He arrests an attention which nothing else could have won. He delivers a message which even the heathen find invincible. He carries light into the black heart of the night. So he wins over to God's side that which defied and denied God. He verifies God's honour by changing the very nature of that which was most antagonistic into an irresistible evidence of His love and royalty.

"That was the highest deliverance made by Israel. Man had wondered why God did not blot out the things that were against Him by a stroke of His hand, by the fire of His wrath. The Servant of the Lord declared that there was only one way of victory which was worthy of God—that of overcoming evil from within, by the invading might of Sacrifice. For the sake of this slow winning, He tolerates what is so intolerable : He endures patiently each outrage and scandal. He will not strive

nor cry, until He can, through the unconquerable persistence of love, bring judgment into victory, by wringing the victory out of the very material which has set itself to work defeat."[1]

We have reached no "explanation" of why there is a problem of evil. That a night of darkness can come upon men remains still an inexplicable mystery. Yet it *is* true that light does spring up in the darkness, welling up from within it, spreading through it and suffusing it, making it to glow. And this is real light, not a false light or *ignis fatuus* of self-deception or make-believe. It is light deeper than the darkness, un-overwhelmed by it. It makes, so to say, the very darkness to serve it for fuel.

[1] H. S. Holland, *op. cit.*, pp. 56–8.

CHAPTER IV

JESUS CHRIST AND THE RIDDLE

AND so we come to Our Lord Jesus Christ. Quite apart from Him, as we have tried to show, we are not without light upon the tragic in life. Yet how greatly we need more light! For neither the illuminated procession of heroic souls nor the light-bearing figure of the Suffering Servant clear away the blackness of the silent heavens as man looks Godward. Man still remains a victim to fatality, howsoever nobly he rises to meet it and to use it. Nay, in the noblest instance he seems to be God's victim—"We did esteem him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. . . . The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all . . . it pleased the Lord to bruise him, He hath put him to grief (or made him sick)."[1] How strange! Who then is this that smites, and bruises and puts to grief? Who is the hidden or veiled Being before whom the tremendous drama of human tragedy is enacted? We still need more light, for man seems nobler than God. Prometheus-like man seems to have the right to arraign and defy the Power which makes him the victim. I suppose that it is for some such reason that men turn and turn again to Jesus Christ. There is a certain running to Him. To whom else shall they go? In certain moods there seems to be light nowhere else.

[1] Isaiah, liii, 4, 6, 10.

It was the writer's vivid experience in earlier days, amid the desolation and the dread of being out upon "the great waters," that there was one peak at any rate unsubmerged —one light shining in the darkness—even Jesus Christ.

It is somehow natural to us to-day to come to Him, at the outset, that we may only lay hold of His humanity. As has so often been said, we go "back to Jesus," to view Him undoctrinally, to find afresh how He, our brother and fellow-man, looked at life. We desire to share His mind.

So going we find Him unmistakably viewing life as a battlefield between good and evil. He does not explain why it is so, nor attempt to explain the fact away. He takes the world as He finds it. But that He looked upon life as a battlefield means that we are asked to recognize, as integral to His outlook, the presence of Satanic influences in the evil in the world. It is impossible to separate Him from the conviction that the evil which is in man and which besets man has a diabolic source. His own life was a running fight with such powers of darkness. He girds Himself throughout for battle with a personal Antagonist, an "enemy," a "strong man armed," a "prince of this world." He is fully aware that counter to the Kingdom of God which He has come to establish, there stands another kingdom, an alien intruder, the Kingdom of Satan.

This, no doubt, constitutes a problem to us to-day. A belief in the Devil is uncongenial to modern habits of thought. Science tends to depersonalize the world in which we live. It describes it in neutral and impersonal terms. And this is catching. It is more natural to say "It snows, it freezes," than to say "He sendeth snow like wool and scattereth the hoar frost like ashes." The

elements, too, in the moral struggle within men, have commonly lost their personal colouring. Psychology knows nothing of people being tempted by the Devil. It deals with complexes, disharmonies between instincts, and so forth. In this sort of way personal agencies, whether divine, or angelic, or diabolic, have come to be foreigners in the world of to-day.

Hence a swerving away from the attribution by Jesus of this or that manifestation of evil to Satan, and a reluctance to take it into account or to make much of it. It is readily put down to the fact that He shared in the habit of mind of a pre-scientific age. It is explained as figurative or pictorial language. The desire to do so is no doubt prompted by discomfort over traditional ways of picturing the Devil. The fantastic figure of a gentleman with horns and hooves is repudiated and laughed out of court.

Here is a great subject about which it is difficult to write shortly. To say that this or that belief or habit of thought is uncongenial to modern thought is not to say the last word about them. For modern thought is far from infallible. There is much reason for saying that the view of life which depersonalizes it is a partial or abstract view. It is the business of science to leave ultimate questions out of account, and therefore to handle the world impersonally. It is its business, to which it should stick, to study and to describe the processes and mechanisms of nature, without attempting to see in them the hand of the Creator. The fuller interpretation of existence, which enthrones personality at the centre of life, and as its chief clue, is not its business. It belongs to philosophy and theology. And so on.

There is this, too, to be recognized, that the testimony of the greatest protagonists in the moral struggle—the men and women who have gone deepest into life to battle for goodness—impressively corroborates the attitude of Our Lord. As a matter of experience they tell us of the reality of personal powers of darkness. A man, whose life is spent in the attempt to alleviate disease by spiritual means, said to me once: "There is nothing in the New Testament about diabolic forces which puzzles me in the least, for I have had personal experience of what it says."

Further, it is curious that, along with the banishment of spiritual agencies from men's outlook to-day, there goes a widespread tendency to allow the dominion of evil spirits to regain its hold upon the soul. There is a tremendous history behind a belief in powers of darkness—in evil spirits. It held down mankind in bondage for long ages. It still enslaves many millions. The seamy side of modern spiritualism is that it seems to expose some, at any rate, of its devotees afresh to this ancient enemy. "I have been given over to Spiritualism," said a man under medical sentence of death to a friend of mine, "body and soul for fifteen years. And I want to tell you that *I am in hell.*" It may well be that the Gospel has got to recapitulate the work which it did in its first great days; that is, to set men free from the fear of evil spirits, not by denying their existence, but by exhibiting and making actual the victory of the Spirit of God over them.

In any case, the testimony of Our Lord to the reality of a personal force of evil constitutes no "explanation" of the problem of evil. It contains no answer to the question why life should be a battlefield between spiritual forces, good and

evil. It only says that it is so. We should beware of trying to make the fall and power of the Devil serve as an explanation of the evil in life. They have been so used. It has been urged : "All was perfectly right, only the Devil fell, and out of envy of man he tempted man, and man fell ; and then all was wrong." This is no solution of the problem of evil. To attribute it to the fall of the Devil is no more a solution than to attribute it to the fall of Man. If the Devil tempted man, who tempted him ? The question how evil came into the world is only moved back, so to say, one remove. The inscrutable mystery of the relationship of God the Father of Spirits to free spirits remains the same, whether those spirits be angelic or whether they be human.

Let us return to Our Lord as He views life as a moral and spiritual battlefield. Whatever anyone may think of the mode in which He conceived of the evil to be overcome, he should surely defer to His testimony to its reality.

As we turn to Him, what light do we find shining from Him ? At any rate, the light of human heroism. There is, as we have seen, a procession of heroic souls in history who have gone straight forward into the battle of life, and He is at their head. If we can see nothing more, we can, at any rate, "see Jesus," our beloved Captain, our valiant Brother, our tender heroic Lover, who was made perfect through sufferings. His face, ablaze with the glory of self-giving, crowns the great emblazoned line of men and women who, through the ages, have dared all, borne all and given all. He sums up once for all the glory of man's unconquerable soul. He illustrates perfectly the use that can be made of suffering ;

that out of it spring the greatest affirmations of faith ; that it is the great sufferers who have been the great believers—the great lovers who have made the darkness of suffering incandescent with the light of sacrifice.

Let us listen again to von Hügel : "I see as a mysterious but most real, most undeniable fact, that it is precisely the deepest, the keenest sufferings not only of body, not only of mind, but of heart, which have occasioned the firmest, the most living, the most tender faith. It was during the desolation and unspeakable cruelties of the Assyrian and Babylonian Exiles, that Jeremiah learnt the love of God as written, not on tables of stone, but on the living heart of men ; that Ezekiel realized God to be the Good Shepherd going after His wandering, weary and lost sheep ; and that—doubtless then—Psalms were composed of an unspeakable magnificence of unconquerable certainty as to God, the soul's unfailing refuge, its one sure lover and support. It was under the awful persecution by King Antiochus Epiphanes that the Maccabees developed their grand faith. It was more even than by the peaceful lake and on the quiet mountain side—it was in Gethsemane and on Calvary that the trust and love of Jesus awoke to their fullest."[1]

Here then once more, but as never before, is light, in and not obliterated by the darkness, shining upon the face of human heroism. It is supremely bright, as it shines upon the face of Jesus, when we remember that pain is always linked with consciousness and that therefore the deepest pain is spiritual in nature. We need to meditate then on the zeal of Jesus for God, His central devotion to God's Kingdom and His righteousness, His entirely-

[1] Von Hügel, *Essays and Addresses on the Philosophy of Religion*, p. 109.

confiding self-surrender to the Will of the Father : and also on the depths of His temptedness, the spiritual temptation (attacking, as temptation ever does, His special powers) to take some other path, to the attainment of His ends, than the path of the Father's Will leading to suffering and to death : and on the agony of disappointment that that which He had come to bring and share was rejected and flouted : and on the vividness of His sense that He was in the midst of a "sinful and adulterous generation" : and on His loneliness, loneliness deepening the further He went. For as He set His face to go to Jerusalem, He found that His nearest and dearest companions were incapable of understanding His purpose. So alone He had to go forward—more and more "straitened till all be accomplished"—so far as men were concerned, spiritually companionless ; ever forward into the oncoming night, till one betrayed, and another denied, and all forsook, Him. So alone He went down into the dark valley, down into its cold waters, bearing who can tell what spiritual agony, as the sin and blindness of men worked their will ; down into Gethsemane and up to the Cross ; into the darkness, the desolating darkness of Calvary.

Here is the glory of human suffering, shining with unique brightness. Yet once more we should beware of being carried away by our wonder into conceiving that suffering is in itself a good, that it is a necessary thing, just because it can be the occasion of such glory and can be so amazingly borne and used and transfigured. So we are warned—"We thus get in its acutest richness of interdependent light and shadow, the most original and the most divinely true of all the discoveries and powers

of Christianity. Suffering, that very suffering to escape which, as most real and harmful, or to explain which away, as but the false imagination of men, the world before Christianity is seen hopelessly fleeing or as hopelessly ignoring : this same suffering is here both foreknown and suffered by the Revealer Himself. And in this concrete case the suffering is a very world of the most diverse malignity, humiliation, dereliction, anguish bodily and mental ; and the Sufferer here never ceases to maintain, about all this and about every other sacrifice and suffering throughout the world, both that the pain and the trial and the wicked dispositions which may inflict it or which may be roused by it are most real, most evil, and yet that it all, if taken in simple self-abandonment to God, is profoundly operative towards the soul's establishment in an otherwise uncapturable regal beatitude and peace."[1]

We go, at the outset, to Jesus as our human brother. And as such we see Him to be the exemplar of human heroism. But we have to go further. For He Himself raises issues so fundamental in character that they are capable, if left unanswered, of veiling this vision of heroism on which our eyes have been resting. The more the mind of our Lord is studied the more evident does it become that it is full of great basic affirmations about existence. It would be untrue to say that He was a philosopher, but it is true to say that He was a metaphysician, that is, that He was concerned with the ultimate nature of things. He had one main preoccupation, namely, that which was *given* and which was going to be given by God. In other and scriptural words He

[1] Von Hügel, *op. cit*, p. 129–30.

announced that "the time is fulfilled and that the Kingdom of God is at hand." He saw and said that the whole of history, as the sphere of God's will and purpose, was mounting to its climax. That is the essential meaning of His reference to the fulfilment of the Scriptures. That is what He meant when He said that "the day which prophets and kings had desired to see" was present and that "the acceptable year of the Lord" had come. But He not only saw and said this, but He drove forward, with a relentlessness which amazed and scared His followers,[1] towards the supreme hour, to the final all-fulfilling hour of God, that He might receive that which would be given by God when it arrived. He had much to say and to do, much misery to relieve, much in which to educate His followers, but everything He had to say and do was directed towards the hour which was yet to come. His ministry can never be properly understood unless it is seen as a drama of persistent movement to a culminating crisis. It moves as a stream, slowly and deliberately at first, but later more quickly, till, with ever-quickening speed, it rushes into cataract.

Thus He went forward—His face "set steadfastly to go to Jerusalem." He went to put everything finally to the proof. He was not content to say that there was a certain fundamental nature of things upon which men had to build, as on a rock; but He went forward to make one full, final and crucial experiment that the nature of things was so.

As He went He was never fully known—Who He was was known only to a point. He was known to be a man, a prophet, a teacher. That was common knowledge.

[1] St. Mark, x, 32.

He was known to be the Messiah or Christ, the man chosen of God to be His instrument in bringing in His Kingdom. That was the knowledge given only to His inner ring of disciples. He was never to the last hour of the ministry known to be the Incarnate Son of God. To the last His followers remained Jews ; they were never, in the days before His death, in the later sense of the word, Christians. They never got further than the thought and expectation of Him as the Messiah, and what is more, as the Messiah not yet revealed, not yet vindicated. To the last He was to them on the human side of that which separates God from man.

It is indeed most utterly vital to recognize this. The whole drama of the ministry makes it plain. For He kept ever pointing them, beyond Himself, to the Father, whose Kingdom was in arrival and whose hour was to come. And that is what, after a point, they could never understand. How the Kingdom of God could come through that which He explicitly said was coming, and towards which He set His face—that was clean beyond them. It was an unimaginable "thing of God." It was utterly irreconcilable by them with their conception of God. It was sheer unintelligible mystery, which deepened and darkened the nearer the culminating hour drew near. So He was separated from them more and more from Cæsarea Philippi[1] onwards. He was thinking and expecting one thing, and they another. He could but lead them on and they could but follow ; He charged with an incommunicable secret, and they unable to receive it. It was "hidden from them."

So He led them on till the hour struck, the stream

[1] See St. Mark, viii, 27 ff.

broke into cataract, and the night fell ; and He went from them enveloped in the blackness of His inexplicable doom ; and they went back from Him, broken men.

We can never ponder too long or too deeply this drama of the ministry. The more we enter within it the more we shall see that, when He died, Jesus had done one thing, namely, He had raised the one all-inclusive question of existence—God. Deeper than the question Who He, the Crucified, was, was the question—so old, so often asked, but now once and for all brought to an issue—What is the relationship of God to the strangely chequered scene of human history ? What, so far as mankind is concerned, is the ultimate nature of things ?

So we should try to penetrate into the darkness of Calvary and to look at the Cross as gathering into itself the whole insoluble riddle of life. We have seen what that riddle is. Sin is involved in it, the pathetic fact of man's self-betrayal and self-entanglement. But more than sin is involved in it. For man is a victim of fate, whose grip upon him is clinched by death. And all the while it seems that the heavens are silent, and that God watches and does nothing—or that it is He who makes man His victim. That is the riddle of life. But Jesus passionately affirmed that God is not just the spectator of history, nor the destroyer of men. He put His seal to the cardinal characteristic of Jewish faith, of which we have spoken, which affirmed that God was at work in His world, with a purpose of holy love which would some day be ratified and proved victorious. He rejected quite explicitly the notion of the repose of the Creator in a sabbatical peace. When He was criticized for doing a good work on the Sabbath day on the ground that on

one day in seven men should be like God and do nothing, He answered with the great word—" My Father worketh even unto now and (therefore) I work."[1]

He looked, therefore, and urgently encouraged others to look, for the hour, which, everything notwithstanding, He went to meet, to bring divine action and a supreme Arrival from on high. He fostered faith and expectation in others, not refraining from affirmations, which seemed towering and extravagant, about the intimate concern of the Father in human affairs and His care (even down to the numbering of their hairs) for His children. He held before human faith in God the assurance of inexhaustible possibilities. And though His teaching was beyond anyone's receiving, He Himself acted it out, displaying from first to last an entirely confiding and self-abandoning trust in the Father. One thing He had to do and He did it—to do the Father's Will, to finish the work He had given Him to do.

So He went to His death, the utterly innocent victim of human malignity and infirmity.

The more vividly this is discerned, the more blackly mysterious seems His fate. Is there here but one more victim to the tragic in life? Is this only the supreme instance of man " stricken, smitten of God and afflicted " ? Is this but the very climacteric of all tragedy, played out before the silence of heaven? Is darkness then the master over light—here, at any rate, in this life? That is the question which quivers in suspense in the noon-day night of Calvary. Was the last word said, when into the sombre silence there penetrated the old, the representative,

[1] St. John, v, 17.

the all-inclusive cry—" My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me ? "

That is what " the hour " brought. What *can* be made of it as regards God ? Nothing. It is the hour of His foolishness and weakness. It is the hour not of His reign, but death's. Death has everything in its cold grip. And there is nothing more to do, beyond the pathetically impotent last rites—the bringing of the spices and the ointments for the burial of the dead.

This is the Riddle of Life. The raising or putting of it, in literally excruciating intensity, lies embedded at the very heart of Christianity.

. . . . . .

There is perhaps nothing more wonderful in music than the passage in Bach's Mass in B Minor, where the words " *passus et sepultus est* " are heard sinking in low diminishing throbs into silence ; and are followed by the great outburst—" *et resurrexit.*"

Out of the night, the dawn ; out of the end, the new beginning ; out of defeat, the victory ! For " we preach Christ crucified, unto Jews a stumbling block, and unto Greeks foolishness ; but unto them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men ; and the weakness of God is stronger than men."[1]

" The hour " *was* the hour of God, the hour of His coming and His reign. The answer to the Riddle was given. Life was rescued from the grip of death. For God " raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory,

[1] I Corinthians, i, 23–5.

so that our faith and hope might be in God."[1] The great experiment of faith was not made in vain. "Jesus made the final experiment—*experimentum crucis*. He died for His idea of God. He laid His life down. Ever since then history has echoed and rung with the verification : it is echoing and ringing still."[2]

Here is the subject for endless meditation. In Lent we should not only go to Jerusalem to see Jesus die, but we should open our souls to the adorable wonder of His death as transfigured by the Resurrection.[3]

Let us firmly remember that it is the Cross which is the central essence of the Gospel of the Resurrection.[4] The Cross is not left behind as a bad dream, speedily to be forgotten at the dawn of day. It is not just an unhappy thing which nevertheless led to a happy ending, as Bernard Shaw has strangely said. Far otherwise ! The Cross is the very heart of the good news of God. The Church does not carry in procession a picture of the empty tomb : it has ever marched under the Cross, the banner of Golgotha. The Gospel, indeed, is quite enormously more than the affirmation that Jesus passed through death to life. It is the unveiling of the Love of God Himself *in* the Cross of Jesus. It is His love, not His curse which is there disclosed. "God"—so one of the great gospel-summarizing words declares—"God commendeth His Love toward us, in that while we were

[1] I Peter, i, 21.

[2] Cairns, *The Reasonableness of the Christian Faith*, p. 86.

[3] See Appendix II, (*a*).

[4] I am well aware that the laying of emphasis upon the Resurrection at once sets many minds debating the problem of Miracle. I cannot handle it in the text, but venture to refer to two chapters in my *The Returning Tide of Faith* (Nisbet) called "A World in chains" and "A World set free," and also to Cairns, *op. cit.*, pp. 146 ff.

yet sinners, Christ died for us."[1] The Gospel is about God.

There is simply no end to the paradox of it all. Just there where God seemed to be not, just there, nevertheless He was. Where the darkness lay thickest—at the very pitch of the night—there the light sprang up. The very hour when all seemed godlessness, and God seemed called upon in vain, was the hour of the breaking through of the fullness of His love. As we have already implied, the actual demonstration of God's foolishness and weakness was the very revelation of His wisdom and His power. O divine improbability! O amazing mystery of love!

If the Cross, then, is the centre of the Gospel, so is the Crucified. The darkness which shrouded and enveloped Him is taken away. He is unveiled. "He was declared to be the Son of God with power, by the resurrection from the dead."[2] At the outset, we come to Him only as one more man among men. But if we go no further we shall lose track of Him even as man. He will go from us—again and again He has so gone from those who have striven to reduce Him just to the ranks of humanity—wrapt in the darkness of His end. For what had He done by the time He had died? He had raised hope so high that it never had a deeper fall. He had been the herald of an Arrival which did not arrive. He had announced the coming of the Kingdom which did not come. He had made claims for Himself of the most unmeasured kind, which His fate served only to confute. He had called men to Himself, had raised them

[1] Romans, v, 8.
[2] Romans, i, 4.

to an altogether new level of aspiration, only to leave them the more deeply convicted of their sinfulness, the more pathetically the victims of moral impotence.

So it is that into the world of modern "humanitarian" study of Jesus there ever creeps a whisper—Was He mad? And, though His heroism still shines, it is dimmed and obscured by the darkness to which it led. He is lost to those who were so very sure, at any rate, of His humanity. Dr. Schweitzer's word is still decisively true: "Nothing is more negative in result than the modern Quest of the Historical Jesus."

But the vindicating and verifying action of the Father gives Him back to us; with all His radiance undimmed, indeed, made wondrously brighter than ever. Still He is man and our brother. But He is more, He is the Son of God incarnate. And His heroism, His self-sacrificing love, His pouring out of His life unto death, which is the very consummation of the light which, through the length of human history, has welled up within the darkness of life—they all remain. But they are more than they were. For Jesus is more than the fulfilment of the ideal of the Suffering Servant, voluntarily and vicariously suffering all things, smitten, put to grief and bruised by God. The blackness of heaven above the head of the heroic victim has been rent asunder. And it is the Love of God Himself—not just human love—which is seen to be within the depth of the innocent suffering, transfiguring by an astounding alchemy its darkness into light. It is God who was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. It is God *so* loving the world. It is God who is inconceivably more wonderful than man. It is God bearing the very worst from man and making it the

means for saving man. It is God, the Lover of sinners.

So the last word of Israel on the Riddle of Life was taken over by Christianity. "Only it gave to it infinite intensity and scope by identifying the Servant with God Himself. God Himself entered from His own side within the situation which the sin of man had rendered so disordered and shameful. God, Himself, from His own side, undertook the sacrificial task of transmuting shame into glory and curse into boon. God offers His own life, as the pledge that the evil can only be undone by the way of suffering and surrender. There is no other way that is worthy of Him : no other way by which He can make the worst loss subordinate to the highest gain, and subdue His very enemies to become His tools. The Cross of Christ is the answer given by God to the problem of evil."[1]

Thus the "length and breadth and depth and height" of the Gospel open up to our astonished and adoring vision. It has to do with more than sin. It has to do with everything. It reveals the ultimate nature of things. It affirms that basic goodness of the universe to which man has ever clung, despite the evil mingled with it. It certifies to him the reality of divine purpose in the whole immense[2] story of creation. It sets this life against the background of eternity. It opens heaven to pilgrims through this mortal existence. It "brings life and immortality to light."[3] It assures a final and triumphant end to the whole travail of the ages, when God and goodness shall be all in all.

[1] H. S. Holland, *So as by Fire*, p. 58.

[2] We should keep our heads about immensity. It is not so wonderful or significant as the mind of little man who apprehends it.

[3] II Timothy, i, 10.

But it also goes down to the deepest depth of tragedy. It deals with moral evil. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." All life's irreconcilabilities met at the Cross: they were concentrated there. But the worst of them was and is the irreconcilability of sinful men with God the Holy. Nowhere as at Calvary has the deadly nature of sin been so tragically demonstrated. Yet there, and just there, the way was thrown open down which the Love of God came, through the veil that hides Him and over the barriers that separate them, to seek and to find His sinful children. And along the same way—the way opened "by the blood of Jesus" (that is, by His life laid down), they can come home to God, and be reconciled to Him, sinners though they be, finding in the selfsame way a fountain opened for cleansing and forgiveness.

And the reconciling action of God took effect within weak and sinful men. That which "God wrought when He raised Jesus from the dead"—the great deed done outside man—issued in the remaking of man from within. The gift of the Holy Spirit completed the Resurrection. It brought men into their true birthright as children of God, and filled their whole being with the power of a new life. It satisfied "the prayer for life." And it made them one in Christ, in the fellowship of His Spirit and of His Body, the Church. It sent them out to claim the whole world for God, to leaven its whole body with the principles of His Kingdom, and to subdue its evil to the supremacy of goodness. It set them marching towards the final goal and harvest and end. Thanks be to God!

CHAPTER V

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

THE readers of this little book perhaps will feel it to be exacting in its demands upon them. This consideration of the riddle of life, this quest in the darkness for the light, is an arduous affair. It will be well, therefore, to devote this last chapter to the bearing of that which has gone before on daily life and personal religion. It may thus be possible to make the book better fulfil its part as intended for devotional reading in Lent.

(1) *Courage*

First, let it be plainly acknowledged that for the individual Christian the riddle of life *to all appearances* often remains unsolved. He is not provided with a ready answer to the why and wherefore of life's happenings. He has to acknowledge that a great deal in life is inexplicable, that he cannot see through it. To some saintly people, it is, I think, permitted to go further than this. They have acquired the right, won by a holiness of life which has been tested and purified by suffering, to say with St. Paul, "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God."[1] I remember a good woman writing to one tragically bereaved: "As my dear Willie (a very real saint) always said, 'God

[1] Romans, viii, 28.

makes no mistakes.'" Somehow I felt that he was justified in saying so. But it is not for the ordinary run of men to hazard such verdicts. It is best for them reticently to allow that there are many things which do *not* seem to work together for anyone's good. Generally speaking it is far best that Christians should not suppose that the Gospel provides them with pious explanations of everything.

The riddle of life, then, to all appearances remains. Yet it is not what it was when first it began to come home upon a soul in doubt and perplexity. For the Gospel gives the assurance that deep down, behind the veil of appearances, it has been solved. Life is not emptied of perplexity by Christianity. Its rough weather, its darkness, the steepness of its gradients remain. Yet there are stars by which to sail, there is sure anchorage to rest in, there is a light to walk by, there are streams of courage aflow sufficient for the ascent. And the appearance of things is not final. It does not represent that which shall be. It is not in lasting possession, and it is going to be changed. "The darkness is passing away and the true light already shineth."[1] Hence faith can hold on in confidence. The victory of God has already been won, and, though we "see not yet all things subjected to Him," yet we "see Jesus, because of the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour."[2] And this is the pledge to us that in the end all shall be well. The riddle of life still remains. It is a book which no one seems "able to open or to look thereon." But "the Lion that is of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath overcome to open the book and

[1] I John, ii, 8.
[2] Hebrews, ii, 8, 9.

the seven seals thereof . . . the Lamb that hath been slain is worthy to take the book and to open the seals thereof."[1]

So the battle of life can be faced with deeply grounded faith and courage. It is not for nothing. It is not a chaos in the darkness. So it often seems, but it is not in reality so. That there should be such a battle, such wounds and casualties, such blood and tears, remains a mystery. We can therefore understand the great cry of Arthur Clough, as it rings out, with a beautiful sincerity, in his hexameter poem, "The Bothie of Tober-Na-Vuolich." The poem tells of a reading-party in Scotland, shared in by Oxford undergraduates, under the leadership of a tutor. It springs out of the travail of honest souls, in the middle of the last century, with the great issues of life—that travail of which Arthur Clough has the best right to be the representative. He speaks through the lips of the most notable of the young men—"the eager, impetuous Philip." The tutor has essayed to quieten the protesting vehemence of Philip :

"This was the answer that came from the Tutor, the grave man Adam.
When the armies are set in array, and the battle beginning,
Is it well that the soldier whose post is far to the leftward
Say, I will go to the right, it is there I shall do best service ?
There is a great Field-Marshal, my friend, who arrays our battalions ;
Let us to Providence trust, and abide and work in our stations.
This was the final retort from the eager, impetuous Philip.
I am sorry to say your Providence puzzles me sadly ;
Children of Circumstance are we to be ? You answer, On no wise !

[1] Revelation, v, 3 ff.

Where does Circumstance end, and Providence, where begins it?
What are we to resist, and what are we to be friends with?
If there is battle, 'tis battle by night, I stand in the darkness,
Here in the mêlée of men, Ionian and Dorian on both sides,
Signal and password unknown; which is friend? which is foeman?
Is it a friend? I doubt, though he speak with the voice of a brother.
Still you are right, I suppose; you always are, and will be;
Though I mistrust the Field-Marshal, I bow to the duty of order.
Yet is my feeling rather to ask, where *is* the battle?
Yes, I could find in my heart to cry, notwithstanding my Elspie,[1]
O that the armies indeed were arrayed! O joy of the onset!
Sound, thou Trumpet of God, come forth, Great Cause, to array us,
King and leader appear, thy soldiers sorrowing seek thee.
Would that the armies indeed were arrayed, O where is the battle!
Neither battle I see, nor arraying, nor King in Israel,
Only infinite jumble and mess and dislocation,
Backed by a solemn appeal, 'For God's sake, do not stir, there!'"

We can listen here with vivid sympathy, just as we can feel with Matthew Arnold on the ebb-tide beach. Yet we can know—the Gospel, reapprehended, assures it—that all is not darkness and confusion. The King and Leader *has* appeared and He rides ever into the battle. The issue seems doubtful, but it is sure.

Hence faith, on an incoming tide, and courage too,

[1] The highland girl to whom he is engaged.

spring up anew, no matter how much remains uncertain. We can take courage, anyhow, from our King, as He comes into His own again.

"I have a Captain, and the heart of every private man
Has drunk in valour from his eyes, since first the fight began."

(2) *Other-worldliness*

Secondly, we must be resolutely, explicitly, and unashamedly other-worldly in face of the riddle of life.[1] That is, we must be quite clear that this life is a pilgrimage towards another life; and, not only so, but that it is here and now linked with eternity. We must not mind being accused of bringing in another life to redress the injustices of this. The accusation is, in truth, beside the mark. For we are not asked to despair of this life because of a "better time coming." But we are asked to recognize that the fullness of life here is bound up with a life beyond it. For man is so made that he cannot for long live merely within the horizons of this present world. He is unsatiated by merely present satisfactions. The whole history of religion is witness to this. The quest of the human soul, in this transitory life, after the eternal and abiding, never dies away. It springs up ever afresh. "It is," to repeat a quotation, "the endeavour of man," throughout the ages, "to unite himself with the life of an unseen and ruling world and so to win the power from it to dominate and transmute the life of time."[2] Quite true, people endeavour to lead the "worldly" life to keep thoughts which range beyond the present out of

[1] See Appendix II, (*b*).
[2] Cairns, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

their minds. They are occupied with the "cares and riches and pleasures of this life." They would forget all else. But they succeed only at a great cost. Their personalities dwindle, so to say, in stature. They often become more animal and less human. They grow fretful and feverish, while nothing satisfies them. Life proves disappointing. Somehow its eagerly sought fruit does not remain sweet in the mouth. A wistful pessimism, a sense of the pathos of life prove hard to keep at bay. And from them may spring a defiant recklessness or a brooding melancholy. Literature is full of varying expressions of the moods of worldly minds, as they are touched and tinged by that which, when it is fully grown, proves to be despair. For virtue seems to go from this life if this life be all. A certain weariness—a sense of *cui bono* ?—tend to creep over it. It does not explain itself, it seems to lead no-whither.

Quite true, for that very reason, religion has frequently sought to flee from this world, in contempt for its futility. The material world, the body and its appetites, have again and again been condemned as bad in themselves, as holding down and imprisoning the soul. What fearful self-tortures and austerities have abounded in India in men spiritually sick of this life and homesick for another ! What frantic efforts to be loosed from the wheel of existence here and to be absorbed by the Beyond ! No doubt it is also true that an exaggerated other-worldliness has not seldom invaded Christianity. Some hymns would have us look upon this world as of nothing worth and as fit only to be left. They would have even the young to be "weary of earth."

But this is but caricature. The real effect of Christianity

is to "shoot" this life "through with everlastingness." Just because it opens a way through the dark passage-end of death, it lets light stream back upon existence here so as to heighten its values and to double its stakes. Importance, point and purpose—nay, radiance also—come into this present life, when it is seen to be the preparatory testing-place for another. Everything becomes charged with a new urgency, interest and energy.

Such, quite unmistakably, is the other-worldliness of Jesus Christ. He would have men live here in readiness for going hence and going home. He pressed with heaviest emphasis the need that they should use and augment their talents while there is time, and be faithful in the very small things of every day, and discharge with entire honesty their stewardship, and store up oil for their lamps, and live with loins girded and lamps burning—and all this against the summons, and the giving of account, and the coming of the Bridegroom.

Unquestionably He would have us be very practical amid the riddle of life ; and would disapprove any yielding to its pressure which took the form of not living and working and serving to the limit of our capacities and opportunities.

But to be "other-worldly" is more than to look towards a future life beyond this life. It is to be in the beyond now. Heaven is not only to come, but it is here. Life eternal is a present possession.

So in the Christian life, alternating with talents energetically used and stewardships faithfully discharged, but yet more primary than they, there must be room for God-wardness. Our lives have here and now to be hidden with God, our affections set on things above. Else

they will have no rock-foundation when the torrents of adversity beat upon them, no anchorage when the storms arise.

And this means the worship and adoration of God for His own sake.[1] It means the response of our whole souls to His solicitation to give Him joy, to trust, and to be surrendered to Him. The way is ever open for this response, the doors of heaven have been flung right back. No merit of ours is a condition of entry, but only the acceptance of His merciful love for us, though undeserved by us. So let the riddle of life press our reluctant souls to hide our lives more willingly with God in prayer and communion, so that, having a "heavenly conversation," we shall not be "afraid of evil tidings, but our hearts shall stand fast and believe in the Lord."

(3) *The Riddance of Sin*

Thirdly, a true other-worldliness, which has at its heart a habit of intercourse and communion with God, implies the desire to hate and be quit of sin. Nothing in the riddle of the victimization of men by evil circumstances, diminishes the uniquely tragic character of evil within them. The saddest things in the world are not calamities, fatalities, bereavements; but moral failures, infidelities, betrayals. A great man once said, who had been wrung by the death of his lovely wife: "Only one thing worse could happen to me and that is if one of my (eight) boys went wrong."

So the worst service would be done to mankind by any diminution of the "realism," solemnity and thorough-

[1] See Appendix II, (*c*).

goingness of Christianity as regards sin. As was said at the outset, the outcome of a wrestle with the riddle of life should be to clear a way, down which the sin-convicting light of the Love of God may shine in anew upon the soul. It is easy for us to allow the tragic in life to induce in us a wrong attitude towards God. The right attitude is summed up in St. Paul's word, "We are debtors"[1]—that is, we are *vis-à-vis* the overflowing wealth of the sacrificial love of God, to whom, in response, we owe the offering and surrender of our whole selves. It is easy to take up an attitude of self-pity, to feel that God owes us an explanation for the things which perplex and depress us. "Life is such a muddle," a woman once said to me, "that I leave it to God to clear it up."

It is indeed hard to avoid an attitude of grievance and complaint. But if it is melted out of us by the disclosure, at the heart of the world's darkness, of the deeper mystery of the all-overruling love of God—if *that* is one part of the work which the Gospel of reconciliation achieves in us, there must follow a new concern in regard to our inner weakness, our hearts' bitterness, and the "sin which doth so easily beset us." There should come home anew a sense of the wealth of our devotion to ourselves, and the poverty of our responsiveness to God: and with that a realization of the momentousness of moral choices, of the habits which follow from them, and of their abiding consequences. That—can it be doubted?—lies at the centre of the work which it was given to our Lord to do. He brings us face to face with the awfulness of sin. Any indifference to the tragedy of moral evil is utterly alien to His Mind. With an unsparing realism

[1] Romans, vii, 12.

and austerity He lays bare man's deepest need—"the very wounds that shame would hide." Once that is realized, then we must run towards Him, who cannot but be our Judge, that we may come to know Him to be our Saviour. And so the other, the sin-overcoming, side of God's reconciliation will sweep over us; and, tremblingly, we shall stretch out to receive the forgiveness won for and freely given to us, and shall press in with "boldness" into "the holy place" by the way of access opened by "the blood of Jesus," there to be forgiven, cleansed, purified and set free.[1]

The outcome of a glad appropriation of God's reconciliation of ourselves as sinners to Himself should be an Easter life. A Christian should be filled with the sanguine faith that He, who has found the answer to the whole problem of evil and conquered both sin and death, is able to keep him from falling. He should claim that the Resurrection be operative with him as the power of a new, a risen life.

(4) *The Battle with Evil*

Fourthly, if the Gospel has probed with saving power—with a line plumbing the bottom—to the depth of the most essentially tragic thing in life, namely, the sinful and guilty heart, then it should impel forgiven sinners to take their part in the battle with evil in the world. Can

[1] It is not the object of this little book to treat of God's atoning remedy for sin. But it may help some of its readers if I remind them that many difficulties disappear from this the most difficult (though the most precious) element in Christianity, if it is never forgotten that it is God Himself, out of the depths of His Love for men and His hatred of sin, who found the remedy. God Himself found the way whereby He could at one and the same time both condemn the utter hatefulness of sin and swallow it up in the riches of His forgiveness.

any one deny that our Lord saw in the world a mass of preventable evil, capable of being overcome? Or that He lived and died and rose again that He might launch against it forces endowed with power to overcome it?

The Church, to which this power is pledged, has allowed too long a palsy of fatalism to hold it back from claiming the extension of the victory of the Cross, the Resurrection and the Coming of the Spirit to the whole of life.

There is much in life which is finally mysterious and inexplicable, much that seems intractable to and immovable by the power of faith. But the Kingdom of God is here. Our Lord died to bring it in. He brought it in, there where it most seemed absent, at Calvary. The reign of the love of God was established there. And He intends that it shall leaven the whole lump of life and transform it utterly. It may be that the full consummation of that aim will never be here upon this earth, but will only be hereafter. How that shall be is hidden from us. But that leaves quite unaffected the certainty that not one effort to extend the reign of God and His righteousness shall be wasted, but shall have its part in the ultimate victory of God, whereby He shall come into His own in His whole creation and subdue all things to Himself. There is no doubt whatever that the Church has fallen far away from the world-overcoming faith of the New Testament, of which the central fountain was the Resurrection. It has never—since the first great days—made so much of the Resurrection of Jesus as of His Death. It has come to appear to be a death-centred rather than a life-filled thing. It has come to accept and to tolerate evils which Jesus died to sweep out of existence. Why is this?

It would take long to account for it. Part of the reason, no doubt, has to do with the intellectual influences which long have made men doubtful about the reality of the supernatural. A world of ingenuity has been lavished on endeavours to drop the supernatural altogether out of Christianity; to do, for instance, without the Resurrection, and so to "reconcile the faith with modern thought." It is, indeed, as though faith had been frost-bound in wintry weather. But the winter is over and past. There is nothing in the whole range of those intellectual influences which tended to browbeat Christian belief—there is nothing in modern science—to make the possibility of a New Creation incredible. There is nothing, therefore, to hold us back from an unreserved acceptance of the Resurrection.

Hence the call and the opportunity to rediscover the victorious faith of the New Testament. Let us listen to words which bring that faith before us: "The age which followed the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ witnessed the most wonderful outburst of moral and spiritual energy that human history has ever seen. This unsealing of new springs of life and joy is the more remarkable when we set it in its historical context. Mommsen has summed up the condition of the Græco-Roman world in a memorable sentence: 'The world,' he says, on the closing page of his *History*, 'was growing old, and not even Cæsar could make it young again.' The best index of the spiritual vitality of an age is, perhaps, found in the temper of its noblest teachers; and beyond question the soul of that classic age finds its best moral expression in the Stoics. Lofty as is their teaching, it is all directed towards the schooling of men in endurance

of the manifold evils of the time. There is no joy in it, no spontaneity or missionary power. The Stoic can call his own only the ground that he can cover with the sweep of his sword.

"When we turn to the other great race, the prophet nation of the Hebrews, we find its spiritual representatives in Scribe and Pharisee, and in the unknown writers of the Jewish Apocalypse which has been recovered, with such singular effect on our understanding of the New Testament, almost in our day.

"There is no doubt that the prevailing spirit of these writings is pessimistic. Their burden is that of Bernard of Morlaix in later ages :

> 'The world is very evil,
> The times are waxing late,
> Be sober and keep vigil,
> The Judge is at the gate!'

Like the Stoics, their purpose is to fortify the faithful, not to win the world for God.

"Now, right out of this spiritually sad and dying age, there springs the amazing outburst of life and gladness of early Christianity. What Cæsar was unable to do Christ has done. The Christian Church has lived spiritually on the New Testament ever since, because of its vitalising power. Yet the New Testament is only a fragment of an age written by 'a new race,' as they loved to call themselves, spiritually more alive than ours. The trumpets of the spring are sounding through all its pages. The narratives tell the story of the way in which the new life flamed over sea and land, kindling sad and

weary men and women to joy and hope, abolishing enmities with love, lifting them out of sin into purity and peace, taking obscure lives and making them great. Not only is the soul of man quickened, but his brain is made alive after a new fashion. All through the book which is the expression of this movement there beats a storm of new ideas. The writers are thinking all things over in terms of Christ and His salvation. Their writings have for the student the interest of an explorer's chart drawn by the camp fire at night, or as he voyages down the great new unknown stream. There is the thrill of discovery in them, of discovery in the new name and purpose of God—

> 'We were the first that ever burst
> Into that silent sea.'

Even disease and death go down before that rush of life. . . . The conviction which underlies and sustains the New Testament is that here we have the final and decisive opening of the springs of eternal life for all mankind. By the free gift of His own life in Jesus Christ, by a decisive act of redemption, and a final gift of the Divine Spirit, God has definitely answered that age-long and world-wide prayer of the human race which is the soul of all human religion. That prayer is a prayer for life, and it is surely no accident that the supreme possession in the Christianity of the New Testament is the indwelling of the Spirit of God, that its central idea is eternal life, and that its culminating fact is the Resurrection. Henceforward it teaches throughout that man's supreme aim must be to take home and to use the gift, which once

for all God has freely given. . . . It is the teaching of the New Testament that there is nothing essential in the spiritual splendour of the days of early Christianity that may not return, and that is not meant to return. If the Christian Church to-day is not living on the ancient levels, it is not because God's gift of life has been withdrawn, it is because men will not appropriate and use the gift. The fountains of life in God have been opened once for all. And somewhere far above the low valley road along which humanity is toiling to-day with weary and bleeding feet, the fountains of life are still springing in the sun. Some day men will find them again and human history will rise to a new plane. Some day the New Testament will become a new book, more interesting and more modern than the last book of science, or poetry, or international politics. For it is the faith of historic Christianity that it carries within it nothing less than the power of regeneration, that with the coming of Christ into the world, there came also a divine energy of good which, when received by men, can transfigure them. . . . For the New Testament writers another and greater world had come dawning in upon nature and history, the world of Christ and His Spirit, a world of new spiritual forces capable of regenerating and transforming the human soul. This world of life, they all believed, had come to stay. It was destined in the end of the day to triumph and to transfigure humanity. It was, in fact, the *dénouement* of all things, and in this creative evolution of life they found the final solution of the great riddle of the world. God had solved it for them by the revelation which He had given in His Son. In Him the veil, which had, in all ages and lands, lain upon the face of all peoples,

was taken away, and it was now for men through faith to take possession of eternal life."[1]

The time, indeed, is due and overdue for a great coming again of the Gospel in moral and spiritual power. It and it alone can give a soul to our modern civilization. For it can give to men three precious things : a fundamental faith in the nature of things as in harmony with the truth of their ideals ; an object or end for which to live ; a secret of self-mastery. Men the world over are top-heavy with new knowledge of the mechanism of life, and with the power born of that knowledge. The intellect of the world has outstripped its morale. So the power that is present and available lacks direction by those who have noble ends to which to direct it, and are masters over their own selves and their clamorous appetites. Who knows what moral dissolution may not attend upon the use of new-found powers only to promote pleasure ? Who knows but that the greed and the fear of mankind may not so employ the marvellous inventions, which science has elaborated, as to destroy civilization itself ? Were new faith and purpose and conscience and energy to enter within the powers actually conferred upon mankind by science, can it be doubted that the face of the world—even the depths of its worst jungle—would be changed, and that many elements in the riddle of life would be removed ?

(5) *The Fruits of Suffering*

Yet, fifthly, we should not, I think, expect the entire solution of the riddle in this life. Christianity does not justify Utopianism. For to the last life here, it seems,

[1] Cairns, *op. cit.*, pp. 131–40.

will be a character-making preparation for the life that is beyond. Ever on earth there will be the "broken arcs," only "in heaven the perfect round." Hence the conditions of trial and of testing will ever be here while this life lasts. Whatever victories over suffering and pain may be achieved, suffering and pain will, I think, remain as integral parts of life's condition and circumstance. They will always be there to be endured and used and learnt from.[1] Indeed, if the power of Christ's Resurrection is to be made manifest anew, we may be sure that it will come about through those who "know" not only it but "the fellowship of His sufferings." It is not in the nature of things that there can be crowns without crosses. And not only so, but it must be acknowledged that the saints rise up in a great chorus, to extol the fruits which grow only out of the evil of pain and suffering. So much so that they ever incline to look upon suffering as good in itself and necessary to virtue. They testify with great unanimity to the uses of adversity and to the purifications and enrichments of the soul which only suffering can bring. They despise our usual sensual craving for security, prosperity, comfort and ease. They, as it were, slit it right up with such a verdict as "Martyrdom is the highest gain, the best thing possible." They confront tragedy from an angle of view quite other than that of men of the world. So Catherine of Siena, writing to Monica Agnese on the loss of her only daughter, said: "For the whole thing I am deeply content with a holy compassion." Their testimony is expressed in poetry by Coventry Patmore :[2]

[1] See Appendix II, (*d*).
[2] *Pain, Unknown Eros.*

"O Pain, Love's mystery,
Close next of kin
To joy and heart's delight,
Low Pleasure's opposite,
Choice food of sanctity
And medicine of sin,
Angel, whom even they that will pursue
Pleasure with hell's whole gust
Find that they must
Perversely woo,
My lips, thy live coal touching, speak thee true.
Thou sear'st my flesh, O Pain,
But brand'st for arduous peace my languid brain,
And bright'nest my dull view,
Till I, for blessing, blessing give again,
And my roused spirit is
Another fire of bliss,
Wherein I learn
Feelingly how the pangful purging fire
Shall furiously burn
With joy, not only of assured desire,
But also present joy
Of seeing life's corruption, stain by stain,
Vanish in the clear heat of Love irate,
And, fume by fume, the sick alloy
Of luxury, sloth and hate
Evaporate;
Leaving the man, so dark erewhile,
The mirror merely of God's smile."

I think that it would be but levity to reject such testimony. The great teacher von Hügel, on whom I have so fully drawn, was himself, in his own life, though it was lived amid ordinary circumstances, an embodiment of this heroic side of Christianity. "Christianity is," he said in

summary, "essentially an heroism." And, further, "Case upon case has passed in real life, before my eyes, of awful physical suffering (I am thinking of my own dear sister), of deep anguish of soul (I am thinking of a sweet saint of God, a washerwoman whose feet I wish I could become worthy to kiss), of various other, all delicately individual cases, in which (sometimes only slowly and after imperfect beginnings, sometimes heart-wholly from the first) the soul's faith, service, love, devotedness, tenderest abandonment, and acceptance of God, of His Will, of His beauty, so largely hidden behind these black bars and dread purifications, were splendidly, magnificently awakened and sustained."[1]

(6) *Bereavement*

As this little book draws to a close the thought comes over me that I have merely discussed the riddle of life as though by discussion it could be solved. And then I remember that to those who read it the actuality of the thing discussed will sooner or later come home, right home, to them personally, and in a fashion which will, for the time, at any rate, make words and thoughts seem futile. "Could we hold this problem (of evil) at arm's length, discussing it in speculative moods when we grow curious about the make-up of the universe, our case would be more simple. But of all life's problems, this most certainly—sometimes creeping, sometimes crashing—invades our private lives. Every man has a date with adversity which he must keep and which adversity does not forget."[2]

[1] Von Hügel, *Essays and Addresses*, p. 109. See also Appendix II, (*e*).
[2] Fosdick, *The Meaning of Faith*, p. 144.

I think in particular of bereavement, which ever and again plunges those from whom beloved ones are torn into the deep waters. Life often seems so secure, and the ground so firm under our feet. And then come the shattering moments when our security is gone, and it seems that we are but living on a thin crust which, breaking, drops us into the abyss.

Let us be clear that there is nothing that can be either thought or said which can take away from the reality of true sorrow. It is not dilutable or assuageable. It knows no anodyne. Yet we may be over-fearful about it. We may be meeting trouble half-way and magnifying it before it arrives. We should rather listen to the testimony of those who have been in trouble. It is a wonderful experience, for those bewildered by sorrow, to find the wealth and the strength of the witness that comes to them from those who have drunk of the same cup. The promises of the Gospel are not illusory. The Cross, by which God plumbed the abyss of tragedy, is not a beautiful sentiment, it is an actuality which verifies itself when "other helpers fail." And not only so, but sorrow if borne with Godwardness, does not leave us comfortless. It has a witness within itself. I recall the strong words of Dean Inge, written soon after he was bereaved of a darling little daughter : " I think that those who have to bear this sorrow will agree with me that bereavement is the deepest initiation into the mysteries of human life, an initiation more searching and profound than even happy love. Love remembered and consecrated by grief belongs more clearly than the happy intercourse of friends to the eternal world ; it has proved itself stronger than death."[1]

[1] Inge, *Personal Religion and the Life of Devotion*, p. 88.

"Proves itself." That tallies with that which was said on an earlier page. We must not look outside sorrow for anything to take it away, but must look within the sorrow for the witness to a reality deeper than itself. We must not try to plaister over the deep wound of sorrow; we must look for healing at its depth.

No witness to the truth of this has been of more strength to myself than the words of von Hügel, written to a mother on the death, after a long illness, of her little daughter of eighteen months, in answer to a question, "how such suffering could be permitted by a God said to be all good and all powerful?" They are not easy to understand, but they are precious, and, if deeply pondered, will speak to the depths of sorrowing hearts. "You feel—this is your keenest, yet also your most fruitful suffering—that what has happened is cruel, cruel; is what yourself, you, imperfect as you are, would have given your life to prevent. How then, you wistfully ask, can you possibly love and trust such a power, if it exist at all—a power which, in this case, shows itself so deaf to the most elementary and legitimate, to the most sacred of your longings and your prayers? You possessed the darling, and you loved and served it with all you were; who possesses and tends it now?

"How I understand! how keen, how cutting is this pang! And I look around me and again I see a similar bewildering contrast repeated upon an immense scale. I remember, in our own day, the earthquake at Messina, with its thousands of cases of seemingly quite undeserved, quite unmitigated anguish, when our own admittedly most imperfect, badly bungling humanity and governments appeared, as so many dwarfs of pity, alone pitiful,

against this awful background of grim havoc and blind fury and cruelty. And, of course, we could all of us add case upon case from history and from our own experience of souls.

"But please note well. Where does the keenness of this our scandal come from? Why do we, in all such cases, suffer such feelings of shock and outrage? What makes us, in the midst of it all, persist in believing, indeed, persist in acting on the belief, that love and devotedness are utterly the greatest things we know, and deserve the sacrifice of all our earthly gifts, of our very life? Whence comes all this?

"The case is, I think, quite parallel with that as to trust in reality generally. Why is it, as to such trust and such reality, that even the most hardened of the sceptics continue to trouble themselves and to trouble us all, if not as to truth, at least as to truthfulness? Why is untruthfulness so very odious? Untruthfulness is certainly most convenient. Why, indeed, does every at all sane mind find it so intolerable to hold itself to be completely shut up within its own impressions, to admit that these impressions are nothing but illusions, or, at least, are utterly worthless as indications of realities other than its own? Whence springs the suffering—the most keen suffering—of the thought of being thus shut up, if we *are*, in fact, thus shut up within our own purely subjective impressions and fancies? The answer, surely, is that we thus suffer because, in fact, we are *not* thus shut up, because we *do* communicate with realities other than ourselves, and hence that these realities so impress and affect us that only by a painful effort can we, violently and artificially, treat those realities as mere fanciful projections of our own.

"Similarly, if there is no source and standard of love, of pity, of giving, of self-donation—a source and standard abiding, ultimate, distinct from, deeper than, ourselves, a source Itself loving, Itself a lover, and which, somehow profoundly penetrative of ourselves, keeps us poor things, rich with at least this sense of our poverty and with this our inability to abandon love (that very costly thing) as a chimera or a mere fleeting vibration of our nerves: if there is not such a more than human source and standard, then the real, actual situation becomes wholly rootless and unreasonable, precisely in what it has of admittedly greatest, of most precious and most significant.

"Thus both in the matter of Truth and Reality and in the matter of Love and a Lover, we suffer, when scepticism assails us, because we are *not* simply shut up within our own fancies, because (mysteriously, but most actually) we are penetrated and moved by God, the Ultimate Reality and Truth, the Ultimate Lover and Goodness. We are moved by Him Who *is*, Who is before ever we were, Who is with us from the beginning of our existence, Who is always the first in operation whenever there is interaction between Him and us. Because He *is*, we have our unconquerable sense of Reality; because He is Love and Lover, we cannot let Love go. And it is He Who made the mother's heart; it is not simply her love, but, in the first instance, His love, with just some drops of it fallen into the mother's heart, which produce the standard within her which cries out against all that is or even looks like, blindness and cruel fate. . . .[1]

"If then I be asked to whom I confide those I love when, after much utterly ineffectual seeming devotion of

[1] Here follows a paragraph already quoted on pp. 22 ff.

my heart, I have seen them suffer fearfully and disappear from my own care and longing, I answer that I confide them to that Reality and Love, to that Real Lover, whose reality and lovingness and penetration of my heart alone make possible and actual my own poor persistent love. Thus my very bitterness and despair over the apparent insult flung at my love by the world as I know it, turns out to be but one more effect of the reality and operativeness of God, and one more reason (again not clear, not readily transferable, but rich and fruitful) for believing and trusting in Him, in Love, the Lover."[1]

It is, then, to this witness within itself, to be found at the heart of bereavement, that we should trust. In so doing, we rely on no "beautiful" imaginations or pathetically pious "explanations." We rely on the basic fact that, for all our sin and weakness, we share in the life of God. To give men this assurance the whole purpose of God in Christ was directed. The object of the divine search was and is the hearts of men. Not only, with pre-Christian belief, may they trust that in God they "live and move and have their being," but they may know, in the light of Christian revelation, that they *are* His children, that His Spirit is in their hearts, that God abides in them and they in God, that nothing can separate them from His Love.

(7) *The Ultimate Victory*

Finally there is the hope, nay, the certainty, of the ultimate passing away of all evil in heaven, in the life to come. The riddle of life shall, in the end, be wholly disentangled. Death shall be swallowed up in victory.

[1] Von Hügel, *Essays and Addresses*, pp. 113–6.

That that shall be so is in accordance with, so to say, the deep homing instinct of mankind. That after the storms of life there is a haven of rest ; that after captivity there is freedom : that "beyond these voices there is peace"—to such hope the souls of men cannot but recur. The nature of experience here keeps ever suggesting it. Life is such here that a witness to a life beyond inevitably springs up within it. The consciousness of being finite implies the reality of the infinite. Out of the sense that life is transitory and contains "no continuing city" springs the conviction that there is eternity and abidingness. Goodness and beauty, ever imperfectly known here, prompt the belief that there is an absolute goodness and beauty. That life is a battle here engenders the expectation of victory and peace. And so on. This is not pathetic fancy. It is the truth which keeps rising insurgently out of life's deepest experience.

Christianity enters to corroborate and assure it. One note more than any other beats through the whole Bible, and that is the conviction that, no matter what the aspect of His defeat may be now, the victory of God shall at the last be entire ; that, notwithstanding the present darkness, in the end all shall be light.

When we think of Jesus Christ we see how realistic and clear-eyed He was about this mortal existence, its pathetic might-have-been, its mixed character, its insecurity, its sadness and sorrow, its great limitations. He minimized nothing. The most darling treasures of men's hearts He saw were vulnerable by "moth and rust," could be preyed upon as by "thieves." But all this spectacle of human existence was for Him as a foreground, and He looked through it at an order of things *other* than it. In

face of ghastly offences done to little children, He saw through to "where their angels do always behold the Father's face in heaven." And everything here, He saw, was not for ever and ever. It was all temporary and preparatory. Beyond the long days of plodding service He saw the all-rewarding joy of the Lord. Breaking into the night He foresaw the arrival of the Bridegroom and the coming of the marriage-feast, so other than the weary time of waiting. He looked towards the end of all things.

And it is with this vision we must confront the riddle of life and the problem of evil. We must hold to the radical Christian optimism which believes that life is at heart good, and that evil of all kinds is an unnatural alien and intruder within it, which shall be finally overcome and done away. We must therefore allow no lasting place to the evil which tests and helps make character. We must disbelieve that evil is in the end necessary to goodness, or limitation to freedom. No matter how much the spiritual glory of character seems inseparable from circumstances of trial, from temptations resisted, from difficulties overcome, from sufferings used and endured; we must look onwards to the glory which shall remain while the conditions of testing for ever pass away.

For union with God, a perfection of relationship to Him, is the end to which life moves. And with Him is the fullness of joy. He *is* "Light, and in Him is no darkness at all."[1] Even in this life there are moments, bound up with love, which let eternity into time and yield a joy transcending all thought of evil resisted or sufferings endured. And they are the "earnest" of what shall be.

[1] I John, i, 5.

When at last the testing of the soul is over and its purification is complete, then, in the fullness of freedom and perfection of joy, the beloved shall be with the Lover. Finally man shall be at home with God.

In this faith we must pray that we may live and die. Surrounded by mystery, travelling often in darkness, we must travel on to the perfect day—"bearing up and steering right onward." At the last the riddle of life will be made plain, there whither our faces are set, in the heavenly Jerusalem, "where the tabernacle of God shall be with men, and He shall dwell with them and be their God; and He shall wipe away every tear, and death shall be no more, neither mourning, nor crying, nor pain any more; for the former things shall have passed away." Amen.

THE END

APPENDIX I

THE FALL

> My sins have taken such hold upon me that I am not able to look up: yea, they are more in number than the hairs of my head, and my heart hath failed me. *Ps. xl*, 12.
>
> Turn thy face from my sins and put out all my misdeeds: make me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. *Ps. li*, 9.
>
> For we are all become as one that is unclean, and all our righteousnesses are as a polluted garment. *Isa. lxiv*, 6.

Here is the voice of human experience. Here is the soul of man travailing almost in despair with the mystery of moral evil. Such expression of the sense of sin—its misery and bondage—represents a late stage in the spiritual development of Israel. For, as I trust you know, if we are to understand the Old Testament rightly we must look upon it as the record of the progressive self-revelation of God to His people, and of their progressive apprehension of the truth about Him.

A vivid sense of sin, which is the consequence of a vivid sense of the claims upon man of a Holy and Righteous God, was only attained by the people of the Old Testament relatively late in their history. It was one of the great results of the ministry, which lasted for over two centuries, of those inspired men, those mighty men of God, the great prophets. They were faced by the fact that the people to whom they were sent were deficient in a true idea of God and of the demand, which His righteousness made upon them. Quite plainly, as we can see from the earlier stages of the Law, in the times before these great apostles of righteousness, little distinction was made

between breaches of ritual custom and tradition and moral sins: little emphasis too was laid upon the inner character of sin or upon individual responsibility. The claims of God were thought to be satisfied by the external conformity by individuals to corporate religious customs and traditions. It fell then to the prophets to insist, in the Name of the Holy God who looks upon the heart of man, that such conformity was insufficient—that what God required was, to quote one memorable phrase, "mercy and not sacrifice"; "to hearken" and not the "fat of rams."

Thus were God's people taught by Him the deeper realities of personal religion. The more the reality of the One Holy God came home to them, the more they became aware of the moral infirmity in themselves and their fellowmen—the bondage of sin in which one and all were bound. So it is that during the purging and enlightening experiences of the Exile in the sixth century B.C., and during the lessons learnt in the chastening times which followed upon the Exile, we find the mind and soul of Israel wrestling with the great fundamentals of human existence; seeking on the one hand to reconcile God and the facts of life, and to justify His ways with men, and on the other to lay hold aright upon, and to fulfil, the duties which man owes to God. Such was the experiential process which underlies the written page of the Old Testament. God wrote and re-wrote the deep things of the spirit upon the living minds and hearts of His people. Being so written on the tablets of the heart they came to be written on parchment. In this regard remember the great keyword which it was given to Jeremiah to utter: "I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their hearts will I write it."[1]

Now this, I am sure, is the way to understand the Old Testament. To follow this way is to be lifted clean above all the perplexing questions of verbal inerrancy, all the bitter and barren controversies which have tormented so many souls about

[1] Jeremiah, xxxi, 33.

the historical accuracy of the early books in the Old Testament. Let a man plunge into the times of the great prophets from Amos in the eighth century onwards, and he will come upon the religion of Israel, crude and savage in its origins, yet in the making. There he will find God teaching His people—"line upon line, precept upon precept"—correcting and purging their earlier religion, deepening and expanding their knowledge of Himself.

This is the way to reach a secure historical position in the Old Testament. For the great creative prophetic period, during which Israel was at length possessed of a pure belief in One Holy God, is not a dim or prehistoric one—it is lit up by the bright light of historical times. Begin late in the story of Israel, stand as it were on the heights whither they painfully climbed under the guiding hand of God, and thence look back upon the records of the earlier times. Read the contents of the earlier books in the light of the later faith and understanding. For it was only comparatively late in the history of Israel that the traditional accounts of the earlier years were written down. The inherited folklore about the remote beginnings, the traditional stories about the patriarchs, the national saga telling of the deliverance or "exodus" from Egypt, the local tales about the judges, and so on—it was only late in the national history that all this was written down, compiled and cast into the literary form in which it stands in the Old Testament. Understand, in a word, if you can, that the book was, so to say, written backwards. Understand that what matters most is not the historical character of the records of antiquity, but the faith in God, the outlook upon life, the spiritual insight which were in the minds and souls of those in later times who wrote down, revised, reviewed and edited the stories of the past.

Now I have been asked to speak to-night—and it is a formidable task to attempt in one sermon—upon the Doctrine of the Fall. And in the light of what I have already said I assert

that the Doctrine of the Fall is a certain fundamental and unique verdict upon the deep mystery of sin, which was arrived at by Israel as the result of wrestling in actual experience with the fact of sin, which was, in other words, written upon men's souls by the Spirit of God. And it is that spiritual verdict, that interpretation of what sin is, which was expressed in the story of Adam and Eve and their transgression in the Garden of Eden. The truth of what sin is, and the psychology of human infirmity, were thus described in a tale.

The material of the tale is the traditional folklore which was part of the inheritance that belonged to Israel in common with other Semitic peoples. For it is quite certain that the same sort of legendary tales or myths are to be found outside the Bible, in the remains of Mesopotamian civilization, as are to be found in the early chapters of Genesis. Thus, for instance, there is in Mesopotamian mythology the same Creation Myth, a version of which appears in the immortal first chapter of Genesis. Only the myth in its original and, so to say, natural form is unpleasant, with polytheistic and sexual elements in it. But in the Bible it appears, wonderfully, nay, supernaturally, cleansed of all such elements. And the purifying agency was the faith in the One and only God, the living God the Creator, which was not always in the possession of Israel, and yet became, as the result of prolonged and bitter schooling, its greatest treasure. Only late in its history did Israel come to know that Jehovah, their national deity, who in earlier times seemed but to be one among other tribal gods, was the One, the Only God, the Creative Source and Ruler of all things. And it was that knowledge, that faith, which was shared by the man who cast the first chapter of Genesis into its present shape. In the light of that faith he moulded and expurgated the traditional Creation Myth; and made it the supreme vehicle of spiritual thought, not of scientific or historical truth.

The same sort of thing is true as regards the story of the Garden of Eden. There are traces of such a story outside

the Bible. The material of the story clearly is traditional folklore. And this material was used by the compilers of Genesis to express and convey the deep verdict upon the nature of sin, into the possession of which the Spirit of God had put the travailing soul of His people.

That the folklore was there in Jewish and Semitic tradition to be so used subsequently is a wonderful thing. It is striking evidence of the providence and working of God. There amid dim ancestral memories, whose origins are beyond trace, amid the musings, reflections and questionings of a race, He did not leave Himself without witness. Such is the character of folk-lore. It represents the endeavour of primitive man to reflect upon life and to find answers to its mysteries and riddles. The material which make up the first chapters of Genesis are full of such endeavour. Behind the written page you see the figure of primitive man asking questions—about sex, about the institution of marriage, about the sense of shame and guilt, about the toil of man, who in the sweat of his brow wrestles with nature so ambiguously productive of thorns and thistles as well as of fruit: about the pain of women in child-birth: about the subject condition of women: about the marvel of the rainbow: about the confusing number and variety of languages. The same endeavour to find pre-scientific answers to scientific questions is found in races all the world over. I dare say some of you know how in Bantu folklore the chameleon is blamed for the place of death in the scheme of things: he having been sent with a message to mankind assuring them of life, but lingering on the way he was outpaced by another messenger (a lizard, I think), who was charged with a message promising, not life, but death.

Now if all this is true (and it is), you see how necessary it is not to read the opening pages of Genesis, and in particular the story of the Garden of Eden, in a literal fashion, as though it contained scientific or historical truth. You see, rather, how it is necessary to read them for the spiritual truths which a late

faith expressed through the medium of myth and folklore. Thus the great eternal spiritual verities of the One Creative God, and of man made by God in His own image to crown His creation, of man made for God and for goodness, but of man falling by the abuse of his power of choice into sin or transgression—these truths, I say, which are as the gold which came out of the furnace of historical experience, are the imperishable content of the beginning of Genesis. They stand and will stand for ever, quite independently of the historical truth of the stories used to express them. They are not bound up in the least degree with the actual historical existence of Adam and Eve; just as the profound spiritual truth of Our Lord's parables and of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* is in no way whatever dependent on the truth of the stories which they contain.

There is no doubt that to this hour the mind and soul of Christendom suffers from the results of the reading of the opening pages of the Bible in a literal fashion, as the absolute and final Word of God, and as therefore containing guaranteed historical and scientific truth. Here men have quarried as it were great foundation blocks upon which to rear, by the machinery of logical inference, great doctrinal structures. If I had the time I should like to pass in review the tremendous, indeed, awful, doctrinal developments which St. Augustine and Calvin, building upon and adding to foundations laid by St. Paul, constructed out of the literal acceptance of the first three chapters of Genesis as literally and historically true. I am not referring to the doctrine of original sin, that is, the doctrine that the successive generations of mankind find themselves born into a sinful state of society and inheriting a racial and corporate entail of sinfulness. That doctrine is simply true to the facts of experience. But I do refer to the doctrine of Original Righteousness or perfection, the fall from which led to the framing of the frightful doctrine of Original Guilt: and also to the terrible doctrine of the total depravity and corruption of

human nature and to the theory that tends to make sexual intercourse, as such, sinful. Quite true, there have never been wanting within the Church voices of protest against these doctrines: nor has the Church as a whole committed itself to them or made them matters of faith. Yet they have left deep and dark marks on Christian theology. The Augustinian doctrine of Original Guilt has, for instance, left its mark upon the service for the baptism of infants, according to which—thank God it has been revised in South Africa and is being revised in England—the infant is represented not merely as sharing in the racial legacy of the sin of mankind, but as being guilty of sins, so much so that we are asked to pray for the remission of the infant's sins. I can only say, in passing, that I have never used this clause in the service and never will.

But as regards all these great issues, this better understanding and interpretation of the doctrine of original sin to which the Spirit of God has manifestly called the Church, I must rest satisfied with referring you to a great new book. It is the Bampton Lectures delivered by Dr. Williams, now Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity in Oxford University. They were published in book form last year and called *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin.*

But what I do lay stress upon to-night is that penetrating verdict upon the nature of sin to which the Jew was led by God, as he reflected upon and encountered the fact of sin as actual and universal in human experience. This verdict we have every reason to accept as inspired and revealed by God. It is the verdict which does full justice to the awfulness of sin, yet it lets in upon the dark tragedy the light of hope. For sin, it declares, however universal, however inveterate, is neither natural nor necessary. It is not part of God's plan, nor is He its author. It is not His Will. It is an alien element which has marred and corrupted God's creation and His plan for mankind. For sin is the swerving of man from his true destiny as made for God and for goodness—it is his fall into self-devotion.

It is the abuse of human freedom, the rebellion of human wills against God, the choice of man to please himself and not God. It is that which has become a universal condition in human existence; it is that which is verified every time any individual sins. Its very essence is self: and it is that, therefore, out of which man by himself cannot extricate himself.

This verdict is unique. There is nothing to touch the story of Adam and Eve, viewed as representatives of humanity, in all the whole range of human speculation on the subject of sin. It is psychologically perfect. It goes deeper than any other verdict. It (*a*) differs, of course, from the attribution of the authorship of sin to God; (*b*) it differs too from the attempt to interpret life dualistically, as the battle-ground between two absolute and antagonistic principles of Good and of Evil; (*c*) it goes far deeper than the attempt, so favoured by Greek thinkers, to account for sin as ignorance, as though it were true that the knowledge of what is good is enough to enable man to do it; or as though there were the slightest ground for saying that learning and cleverness saved men from being sinners; (*d*) it goes far deeper than modern biological attempts to attribute sin to man's animal nature and ancestry, as though there were any sign that the worst sins were those of the flesh; as though it were not evident (as it was evident to our dear Lord) that the deeper manifestations of sin are not fleshly but spiritual and intellectual—that indeed, in a word, the refined but proud, the cultured and religious, but self-devoted Pharisee follows the publicans and harlots into the Kingdom of God.

It is this verdict upon sin, now disentangled from Biblical misunderstandings and doctrinal accretions, that I ask you to embrace and to act upon. In so doing you need not close your mind to the truth of the evolution of life, and of human life as its culmination, which science puts before us. There is nothing, as, please God, you see, incompatible with an evolutionary view of the world in the belief in God the Creator. Evolutionary science is only hostile to our religion when it is advanced

as a theory of an automatic and godless development, or when it is governed by a materialistic philosophy which would subordinate spirit to matter and reduce man to the animal. Evolution, properly understood, is the story of how God, ever-creating, at length made man in His own image, so that at last, as the crown of the whole amazing process, *homo sapiens* (as the scientists call him) stood upon the earth. Whether or no this specifically human race—separated by a gulf from the anthropoid ape—is to be traced back to a single pair thus at last created by God, about that we must not dogmatize. But this we can say, that there is nothing incompatible with science in supposing that when at length man (whether in a single pair or as emerging in a wider distribution) was endowed with that measure of freedom which made him capable of obeying or of disobeying God, he *did* transgress and did fall from his true destiny as planned by God for him.

But, last of all, I bid you embrace the Biblical verdict upon sin because it is full of Christlike hope. We need hope with which to face the awful range and inveteracy of human sinfulness. Sin, indeed, has taken such a hold upon mankind that he is "unable to look up"—all his "righteousness" does seem to be as but "a polluted garment." It is easy to despair about it, to grow cynical in face of it, to yield to it as inevitable and as natural. But if here, as everywhere, we try to do one thing, that is, to share the mind of Christ, then we shall do none of these things. We shall face the moral struggle with invincible hopefulness. For thus did our Blessed Lord meet full-face the sin of mankind. He looked, nay, He entered. into the terrible depths of moral evil into which man had fallen, He threw upon the dark scene of human infirmity and bondage the white light of His holy passion for goodness. But He saw everything as remediable. He saw that deliverance was possible. He looked deeper than the sin in man. He saw the good still there in fallen human nature. He did not—let us proclaim this—look upon men as utterly corrupt or as totally depraved.

Rather He saw in them God's children, and His own brethren. He believed in them, appealed to them, and trusted them. And not only so, but He realized the hope with which He faced the tragedy of sin. He delivered mankind from the dominion of moral evil. Though He was surrounded to the last by human infirmity, though the men who became His friends failed Him, though Peter denied Him, He did not despair. But He carried through His task as the Saviour of men. He yielded Himself to the doing of the Father's Will, and so became the instrument whereby man was brought, sin notwithstanding, into his true inheritance, into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Face sin then ; this tragic, subtle, unnatural thing. Face it in yourselves and in society. Face it, don't minimize or gloze it over. It is a fact, a tremendous reality. It separates from God. It destroys your inheritance. And it is too much for you. Out of its bondage you cannot deliver yourself. For you have yourself betrayed your self. But God can deliver. He has come to save His children from sin. He will save us and set us free. Thanks be to Him.

APPENDIX II

(*a*)

Easter Monday, April 5, 1920.

I HAVE purposely waited till we should all have got through these every year newly wonderful Church days—so as to be able to refer to the entire *prism* of many-coloured fact and emotion—which only thus together give us the true Christian reality and life. The great fact, and even the commemoration of Good Friday, would, alone, be too austere, too heart-breaking. The great fact and even just the Feast of Easter, if alone—even if they had followed upon our Lord's Hidden Life, or even His preaching, but without the Passion and its commemoration—would not have drained the Cup, the bitter cup of the possibilities of earthly human life and earthly human interconnections to the dregs. Good Friday *and* Easter Sunday, the two together, each requiring the other, and we all requiring both—only this twin fact gives us Christianity, where suffering holds a necessary place, but never the place of the end, always only of the means. My great Troeltsch always marvels anew at that *unique* combination effected by Christianity so earnest and yet so *un*rigoristic—so expansive and so full of suffering without morbidness, and of joy without sentimentality. We will all, please God, see this more and more every year that these bitter-sweet, contraction-expansion, sacrifice-serenity great days come round. . . .

Von Hügel, *Letters*, p. 303.

(*b*)

I felt it strange that W. T. so little realized, so little stressed, the primary end and function, surely, of every Church deserving of the august name—the awakening souls to, the preparing them for, the holding before them embodiments of, *the other life*, the life beyond the grave. Very certainly the Church has also to help in the amelioration of *this life*; but, I submit, always after, and in subordination to, and penetrated by, that metaphysical, ontological, other-worldly sense and life which alone completes and satisfies fully-awakened man.

Von Hügel, *Letters*, p. 220.

(*c*)

Of adoration he said: "The essence of the objective, full Reality of God, and the need of Adoration, are quite essential to Religion." For him, not benevolent philanthropy, on the one side, nor intellectual dogmatic statement on the other, but Adoration, was the last word and final end of religion. . . . "I thought him looking very ill, and it was just before his breakdown. . . . He spoke of the effort it sometimes cost him to get his mind to work on his great book . . . and he got on to the subject of Parkman's long writing on Canadian history. He described how Parkman never spared himself, and, in spite of bad health, worked on and on until he got his book completed —the great earnestness of purpose which he displayed.

"'And yet,' said the Baron, 'it wasn't Religion. There was no Religion in the hard work and sacrifice.'

"'What is Religion, then?' I asked.

"'Religion is Adoration,' answered the Baron.

"I have thought of it ever since."

To this same friend he said, about four weeks before his death, with intense earnestness, "It is very awful to think of the unbelieving soul"—the soul void of God-consciousness and Adoration.

Von Hügel, Memoir printed with his *Letters*, p. 51.

(*d*)

Looking back now, I am grateful for nothing so much as for this—that, given the suffering and trials which God then sent or permitted, He also gave her a light, far more vivid and continuous than it used to be, and an ever-growing acceptance and active utilization of it, as to the place, meaning and unique fruitfulness of such suffering, thus met (as it were) half-way, in the mysterious, but most certain, most real scheme of the deepest life and of God.

When we first got to Rome, she was wonderfully plucky and courageous, "grinning and bearing," a dear Stoic. But then gradually she became, in this too, more and more sensitively Christian. The Cross became, not simply a fact, to bear somehow as patiently as we can, but a source and channel of help, of purification, and of humble power—of a permanent deepening, ordering, sweetening of the soul. . . . I put all this to yourself, as I do to myself, because I have long felt that it is the *apparent sterility of suffering* which adds the final touch of trial to our pains; and that this appearance is *most truly* only an appearance. Not, of course, that suffering, simply of itself, is good or operates good; but that God is more living and more real than all suffering and all sin; and that He can, and will, and does, give concomitant opportunities and graces and growths to the sufferer, if and when the latter is humble, watchful and prayerful in such utilizations. How I wish I could help much, very much, to lessen your pains, but—I admit—above all, towards their transmutation! You can and will now help us all a hundred times more than when you were in health; suffering can be the noblest of all actions.

Von Hügel, *Letters*, pp. 226 f.

(*Written after the death of his daughter to a friend in his last illness.*)

(*e*)

As to your spiritual question, my dear—as to how you are, not simply, once for all, at the beginning of all this discomfort and pain, to accept and will it; but (as you most rightly feel, a very different thing) how we are to stand it, to keep on accepting it, day by day, even hour by hour, possibly minute by minute . . . let me suggest to you the following. I take it that *this is precisely the most irreplaceable function and grace of suffering*, when it is at all at its fullest, that we cannot, do what we will, cut a decent figure in our own eyes; that it rises, *emphatically*, beyond a stoic exercise. All we can do (and how dear and darling this poor little "all" is then to God!) is gently to drop, gently to try to drop, all foresight whatsoever; to treat the question how we are going to stand this for a month, or a week, or a day, or even an hour, as a little presumption on our part. We cannot really, of ourselves, "stand" it properly for half an hour; and God will and does give us His grace to stand it, for as long as ever He chooses, provided we will, according to the intensity of the trial, contract our outlook to the day, or the hour, or even to the minute. God, the essentially timeless, will there and then help His poor timeful creature to contract time to a point of most fruitful faith and love.

Von Hügel, *Letters*, p. 230.

(*Written to a friend in his last illness.*)

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